Dogmatics among the Ruins

The relevance of German Expressionism and the Enlightenment as contexts for Karl Barth's theological development

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Declaration of Authorship

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work contained in it is my own.

Abstract of Thesis

The relevance of cultural history to the development of Karl Barth's theology has been greatly undervalued. Taking a short term view, Barth's development can be compared in detail with the modernist movements of the early twentieth century, and in particular with the history of German Expressionism; taking a longer view, Barth's theology can be seen as a response to the failure of the Enlightenment project. These two perspectives, moreover, yield complementary insights.

Barth's earliest ventures into theological print coincided with the emergence of Expressionism; both were given direction by the First World War; both achieved success in the immediate post-War period, while simultaneously suffering significant disappointments; and in the early 1920s Expressionist writers and artists turned away from their previous forms in an effort to overcome their alienation from community, just as Barth turned away from dialectical method in favour of a discourse situated in and directed to the life of the Church. Barth's theology was effectively engaged in a dialogue with the central ideas embodied in modernist movements like Expressionism, and can be read as a development towards the dialectical inversion of the core ideas of modernism.

Taking a longer view, though, both modernist culture and Barth's theology can be illuminated by placing them against the history of the Enlightenment and its aftermath. This is a history which has been analysed usefully by Alasdair MacIntyre, particularly in *After Virtue* and subsequent publications. In the light of MacIntyre's work, Barth's inversion of modernism appears also to constitute an inversion of the ideas embodied in the social world which emerged from the failure of the Enlightenment project.

This reading of Barth can be supplemented and expanded by attention to his own analysis of the Enlightenment in his lectures on the background to and history of modern Protestant theology. Barth argued there that modern theology, down to and including his own time, had been shaped decisively by the Enlightenment. Yet like MacIntyre after him he discerned a flaw inherent in the project of Enlightenment, and believed that that project had in fact failed. Barth's theology appears, in consequence, as the attempt to re-establish dogmatic theology among the ruins of Enlightenment pride.

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Contents

Abbreviations

AV	Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*
B-Th. Br. I.	*Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel:* Band i. 1913-21
B-Th. Br. II	*Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel:* Band ii. 1922-30
CD	Barth, *Church Dogmatics*
CGG	Barth, 'Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte'
CRDT	Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*
EGE	Paul Raabe (ed.), *The Era of German Expressionism*
EM	Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism*
ET	English translation
GD	Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, vol. i.
GPG	Barth, 'Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott'
MTR	Barth, 'Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit'
PT	Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*
Romans I	Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Erste Fassung) 1919*
Romans II	Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*
WE	Walter Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis*
WGWM	Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*

In his lectures on the history of modern Protestant theology, delivered in Münster in the winter of 1929/30, Karl Barth gave some interesting advice to anyone who wished to study the history of modern theology. They should, he said, make "a synchronous chart for every single year of the period". It should contain:

> five columns: the first for entering the most important dates of world history in general; the second for the most noteworthy events in the history of culture, art and literature; the third for church history in general; the fourth for the dates of birth and death of the most prominent theologians of the period; and the fifth for the years in which their most important books were published. Anyone who does this will see a mass of connexions.[1]

This insistence on a connection between theology and its context in political, cultural and ecclesiastical history is striking. It should not be thought, either, that Barth paid only lip-service to such a connection: his own lectures on the history of modern theology display a consistent and serious attention to context. The earliest version of them, delivered in Münster in the summer semester of 1926, included a section entitled "Chronik" which consisted of a complete year by year list covering the period 1799 to 1926, and containing information in all the categories mentioned above. This he apparently dictated in full to the students, devoting two whole lectures and part of two

[1] The lectures were delivered under the title "History of Protestant Theology since Schleiermacher". A typescript of them is held in the Karl Barth-Archiv in Basel. This was the second of three occasions on which Barth lectured on the history of modern theology. The first had been in Münster in the summer semester of 1926. The third and final version was prepared and delivered in Bonn in 1932/33. That third version, for the most part, is the basis of the published text: *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte.* (Evangelischer Verlag AG., Zollikon/Zürich, 1947). English translation *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century. Its Background and History* (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1972). Only the section on Gottfried Menken was published earlier, in a 1933 Festschrift for E.F.K. Müller. See Eberhard Busch *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts* (SCM, London, 1976), 222. The quotation here is from *PT*, pp. 25-6. However, the history of the lectures is complex, and the published text appears in fact to be a composite of the versions of 1929/30 and 1932/3. In particular Chapter 1 of the published text, in which this quotation is found, comes from the 1929/30 lectures and appears not to have been included in the Bonn lectures. I am indebted to Dr. Hinrich Stoevesandt of the Karl Barth-Archiv on this point. He advises me that the Archiv holds a typescript of those lectures written completely anew in 1932/33, (i.e. chapters 2-6 of the published text). In this typescript the 1929/30 introduction has been replaced by a somewhat shorter introductory section.

others to the task.[2] When Barth lectured on modern theology for the second time, in 1929/30, he dropped this detailed table but included in his introduction the recommendation that students do this for themselves, as quoted above. Moreover he then prefaced his lectures on theological history with substantial discussions of Lessing, Kant, Herder, Novalis and Hegel. When he lectured on the subject for a third time, in Bonn in 1932/33, he prefaced all this material with a lengthy discussion of the Eighteenth century, including its political, social and cultural history, and its general attitude to religion and the church, as well as the history of its theology. The result, in the published version, is a book in which the background to modern theology is given almost twice as much space as the theology itself.

This suggests, among other things, that Barth was serious about the relation between theology and a wider historical context. My intention in this thesis is to follow him in taking this relation seriously - while studying Barth's own theology. I wish to set Barth's theology against the context of a wider, non-theological history. The context which I will be concerned with in the first instance is the cultural life of the period in which his early theological development took place: roughly the years 1910-25. In German speaking culture, the dominant feature of these years was the birth, development and decline of the diverse movements known collectively as Expressionism.[3] The first part of this thesis will therefore examine the relevance of Expressionism

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[2] See the manuscript of these lectures, held by the Karl Barth-Archiv, Basel. Barth's marginal dates suggest that he spent part of the lecture of 6th May, all of the lectures of 7th and 10th May, and part of the lecture of 11th May on this section.

[3] Some relation between Expressionism and Barth's theology has long been recognized. In his invaluable study *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, (Verlag Jacob Hegner, Köln, 1951), Hans Urs von Balthasar described the second edition of Barth's *Romans* as "theological expressionism". ET: *The Theology of Karl Barth* trans. Edward T. Oakes, (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1992). The reference is to p. 83. A more recent example is Richard H. Roberts: "The parallels between Barth's early post-war writings and Expressionism are considerable; whilst this affinity has been noted, this would merit fuller comparative study." From "Barth and the Eschatology of Weimar: A Theology on its Way?" in *A Theology on its Way? Essays on Karl Barth* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991), 172, note 11. There are several brief discussions of the relation in the literature. See for example Werner M. Ruschke *Entstehung und Ausführung der Diastasentheologie in Karl Barths zweitem 'Römerbrief'* (Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1987), 155-8; Stephen H. Webb *Re-Figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991), 8-18. As Webb has pointed out (p. 185), the literature on Expressionism is almost devoid of references to Barth, but one useful exception is Wolfgang Rothe *Der Expressionismus: theologische, soziologische und anthropologische Aspekte einer Literatur* (Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1977), 43-7.

as context for the development of Barth's theology.

A wider perspective on cultural history is also necessary, though, not least because Expressionism itself was part of a larger history. German culture during the early part of this century was by no means isolated from developments throughout Europe; nor was it unconnected with earlier German cultural history. To understand Expressionism in any depth it is necessary to see it both as part of a wider wave of modernist movements in Europe, and also to appreciate the ways in which it was the product of characteristically German cultural traditions, going back through Romanticism to the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment. To consider Barth's relation to his immediate cultural context, then, leads inevitably into a study of his relation to these wider histories. It leads to a study of the relation between Barth's theology and modernist movements in general; and, taking a longer view, to a study of his relation to the Enlightenment - its projects, its achievements, its failures and its legacy.

Such a project would, of course, be perfectly legitimate in principle even if Barth himself had displayed no interest in the relation between theology and other areas of social and cultural life. Its propriety in no way depends on his *own* view of the relation between theology and culture. Yet his attitude, quoted above, is important. It suggests at very least that to study Barth's theology in relation to culture is not to prejudge its worth. To argue that there existed a significant relation between Barth's theology and its cultural context is not necessarily to devalue it. This point needs to be emphasized, since it is often assumed that the opposite obtains. Many commentators on Barth, conscious of his stress on the distinctness of theology's task and criterion, are given to emphasizing the purely theological roots of his thinking. T.F. Torrance, for example, discussing the formative influences on Barth's break with liberal theology, identifies the primary factor as his discovery of "the new world within the Bible, as week by week he ploughed over the ground in careful laborious exegesis".[4] Torrance expands on this by depicting Barth as sifting out the Word of God from any social or cultural influences:

[4] T.F. Torrance *Karl Barth: an Introduction to his Early Theology 1910-31* (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1962), 34.

> He was determined to hear the Word of God out of itself, as it came straight from above, unfettered by a masterful culture, uncontrolled by the needs and satisfactions of bourgeois society, and before it had been sifted and diluted by being passed through some general frame of thought already worked out by modern man.[5]

The picture here is of Barth attempting to re-establish theology on the basis of the Word of God, in distinction from those theologies which, under social and cultural influence, lost sight of their true object. There is undoubtedly some justification for such a picture. Barth did regard the entanglement of modern theology with culture as one of its most significant errors. In his lectures on modern theology (which constitute by far his most detailed and sustained treatment of this theology) he develops the critique in considerable detail. He suggests that the failures of modern theology stem from the fact that it allowed itself to be shaped by social and cultural developments, and that it thereby fell into a moralism in which theological statements had only ethical content, even when they had dogmatic form.[6] Such theology, he suggests, failed to perform its fundamental task of leading and guiding the Church. Instead, the Church took its lead from the prevailing culture, with theology dragging along in its wake, trying to be contemporary but always in fact lagging behind the times.

The result, Barth said, was that in modern theology there was no clear distinction between the advance of Christianity and the advance of modern civilized culture. Of Schleiermacher he said:

> By birth and upbringing in its innermost sanctuary his theology is cultural theology: in religion itself which is the true object of his theology, it is the exaltation of life in the most comprehensive sense, the exaltation, unfolding, transfiguration, ennobling of the individual and social human life which is at stake. Civilization as the triumph of the spirit over nature is the most peculiar work of Christianity, just as the quality of being a Christian is for its own part the crown of a thoroughly civilized consciousness. The kingdom of God, according to Schleiermacher, is utterly and unequivocally identical with the advance of civilization.[7]

Schleiermacher and the nineteenth century in general were not engaged in

[5] Torrance op. cit. 35.

[6] This argument is described in detail in chapters 5 and 6 below.

[7] Barth, *PT*, 434-5.

mystical theology but cultural theology.[8] The theology of the period was characterized, Barth says, by its "unqualified and direct affirmation of modern cultural consciousness".[9] This is the heart of Barth's view of modern theology. It was a theology which allowed contemporary cultural consciousness to have an independent validity over and against any criterion which Christian theology itself might have. It was therefore unable to find room for the possibility that there might, in Barth's words, be a "secret of Christianity at some point beyond all culture".[10]

Barth's criticism of those theologies which get entangled with culture was severe. However, it has to be noted that he could not have made any such criticism had he not studied the theology of the modern period in the context of the development of "modern cultural consciousness". His diagnosis of the failures of modern Protestant theology, in these lectures, comes after a detailed discussion of the cultural and intellectual life of the Enlightenment and its aftermath, and of its influence upon the life of the Church and on theology. And what Barth objected to was not that modern theology was *interested* in modern cultural consciousness, or *related* to it, but that it tended to *identify* Christianity with the development of that consciousness. He did not expect the theologians of the 18th and 19th centuries to remain untouched by their times, but he did expect them to retain some notion of their own distinctive task and criterion.

There is of course a very strong echo here, in Barth's historical writing, of his own theological views. This is as important as it it unsurprising. For his willingness to recognize the connection between theology and a wider context was no idiosyncrasy of his historical writing. His theological views enable and demand a recognition of the limited and relative character of all theology. While Barth was concerned to maintain that Christian theology was a form of enquiry with a quite distinctive task and criterion, he was equally concerned to remind theology that it was and is always a historical, human activity. It ought never to imagine that it can grasp or possess its

[8] It was as a consequence of this analysis that Barth was so critical of Emil Brunner's interpretation of Schleiermacher in *Die Mystic und das Wort*, of 1924. See 'Brunners Schleiermacherbuch' in *Zwischen den Zeiten* 2 (1924), 49-64.
[9] Barth, *PT*, 437.
[10] Ibid. 435.

criterion - the Word of God - and thereby elevate itself above the rest of human history - social, political, cultural, and intellectual. This is evident in, amongst other things, Barth's view of the relation between theology and philosophy. His view was not, as is sometimes suggested, that theology should or could cut itself off entirely from philosophy. It was, rather, that theology should never be captive to or subject to a philosophy. It must make use of it as it can; but such use ought always to be in the light of its fundamental awareness of its own distinctive nature. Theology cannot avoid dealing with philosophy. What matters is *how* it deals with it.[11] Similarly, his argument in *Protestant Theology* was not that theologians in the eighteenth century should or could have avoided the influence of the Enlightenment altogether. The point he wanted to put to them was that they should have been able at the same time to keep sight of their own particular aims and norms.[12]

So for all his stress on the distinctiveness of Christian theology, Barth was in fact able to be remarkably frank about the historical conditioning of theological reflection. An important statement of this was in his preface to the fifth edition of his commentary on *Romans*. Responding to critics who had noted the book's debts to other authors, Barth asks the following:

> Am I after all merely one of those bad theologians who are no more than servants of public opinion? ... Have they [Barth's readers] been presented with what is really no more than a rehash, resurrected out of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and Cohen? If this be what has actually occurred I must accept judgement and recognize that I am just the author of—a bestseller. But why should this not be the truth? And even if it were not true, no credit would be due to me or to my book.

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[11] Barth summed his view up neatly: "There is choice irony on God's part. He tells us: Since you have philosophy in you, well, have it and do your best ... ! But on condition that your philosophy does not prevent you from being disciples." See Busch, *Karl Barth*, 300. From *The Faith of the Church: a commentary on the Apostles' Creed according to Calvin's Catechism* ed. Jean-Louis Leuba, trans. G. Vahanian, (Collins, London, 1960), 27-8. Von Balthasar put this as follows, in defending Barth from the charge of philosophism: "He [Barth] knows, and he has repeated it often, that every theologian has no choice but to work with human concepts and thought forms. ... He has made use of them, not as a philosophy *per se*, but as a helpmate for theological work, transposing them and submitting them to a necessary critique, sterilizing the instruments before using them in his theological operations. ... Everything depends on the discretion with which theologians know how to handle their instruments." *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 218-9.

[12] See Barth, *PT*, 139.

Acknowledging this possibility, then, Barth makes the following point:

> It may be that every criticism implied in the former reflection is justified, and yet that nevertheless, in spite of much arrogance and wrong-headedness, aye, even in the midst of it, something has been brought out into the open through what has been observed and said in this book—as it were by forensic justification.[13]

The justification of a theology is never that it is immune to public opinion or to the influence of the times and their prominent spokesmen: but nor, then, does such influence invalidate a work. To study such influences may aid understanding, but it cannot justify dismissal of the work any more than it can justify the work itself.[14]

I can now, perhaps, make the nature of this thesis a little clearer. First of all, it does not intend to engage in reductionism, attempting to explain away Barth's theology as a product of contingent historical circumstances which may or may not obtain any longer. Nor does it begin from determinist premises, such that Barth could do nothing other than re-transmit the voices that rose to the surface at that particular moment in cultural history. On the contrary I am aiming at a better theological understanding of Barth. There is no parting of the ways, where students of theological and non-theological history must adopt distinct and incompatible presuppositions or methods. The student of Barth's theology who wishes to consider its wider context faces no impassable border - not least because Barth himself recognized no such impassable border.

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13 *Romans II,* 22-3.

14 It is worth noting that similar affirmations can be found in the *Church Dogmatics*. See for example *CD* I/2, 802-803: "Church teaching always exists in specific forms, i.e., in sequences of thoughts and ideas which specifically choose, emphasize and underline, or again deny and suppress. If all is well the one aim of these sequences is to explain and apply Holy Scripture, and therefore to proclaim the divine revelation. But *in concreto* they always owe their origin and persistence to the specific currents of Church life (conditioned by the general historical situation), which emanate from the concrete personality of individual preachers and the character of their congregations." Or again at p. 884: "But not even for a moment can we forget that, when and in so far as we do think and speak the truth in Church proclamation and dogmatics, it is God himself and alone who, using man as his servant, and without incurring any obligation to him, has actually thought *His* thoughts and spoken *His* word. It is only in this modesty that we do think and speak the truth. And this modesty includes the realization that in God's light we are shown to be darkness, in God's judgement we are exposed as liars, and that we shall think and speak the truth always against our own selves."

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Chapters 1 and 2 will provide the initial material on the basis of which the relation between Barth's theology and its cultural context can be assessed. Chapter 1 will discuss Barth's theological development beginning around 1909, passing through his break with liberalism in 1915, and going as far as his Elgersburg lecture in October 1922. Chapter 2 will discuss Expressionism including its relation to its contexts in both German society and modernism more widely. On the basis of the material in these two chapters, Chapter 3 will consider the connection between Barth's theology and Expressionism, and therefore its relation to cultural modernism in general. Chapter 4 will extend this discussion to consider Barth's relation the Enlightenment and its legacy, with particular reference to the account of the Enlightenment developed by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* and more recent works. Chapters 5 and 6 will consider in detail Barth's own understanding of the Enlightenment and its aftermath, in his lectures on modern Protestant theology.

i. Barth's development and the quest for the "insight of the beginning".

In so far as there is a standard view of the development of Karl Barth's theology, it is the one commonly associated with Hans Urs von Balthasar's 1951 study *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie.* This view emphasizes two significant turning points in Barth's theology: his initial turn away from liberal theology in the aftermath of the outbreak of War in 1914, and his "great shift ... from dialectics to analogy",[1] associated primarily with Barth's book on Anselm published in 1931. Von Balthasar says: "Just as Augustine underwent two conversions, the one from gross error to the true God and to Christianity and the other (much later) from the religious Neoplatonism of his early writings to an authentic theology, so too in Barth we may find two decisive turning points."[2] Of the second of these, the shift from dialectics to analogy, von Balthasar says: "The first work to document this change in his [Barth's] thinking was his book on Anselm's proofs of the existence of God, which he himself has called the real manifesto of his departure from his first period."[3]

More recently, some scholars have argued that this picture, and particularly the suggestion of a turn from dialectic to analogy around 1930, is inadequate. There are three main elements involved in this reassessment. First, there have been doubts about the identification of the Anselm book, and therefore of the year 1930, as the location of a decisive turn; there has been a suspicion that significant changes took place in Barth's thinking during the twenties. The publication of Barth's dogmatics lectures from Göttingen has reinforced this questioning, suggesting that he had begun to

1 Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth,* 137.
2 Ibid. 93.
3 Ibid. 137. The reference is to *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Zürich, 1931). ET: *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme* (SCM Press, London, 1960).

depart from the 'dialectical' theology of the second *Romans* as early as 1924.[4] Secondly, a number of doubts have been raised about the appropriateness of the designation of Barth's development after the second *Romans* as a turn "from dialectics to analogy." Bruce McCormack, in his recent study *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* classifies the problems with this view under four headings.[5] First, the formula of a turn from dialectic to analogy is misleading because more than one thing in Barth's thought can be designated by the term 'dialectic'. Second, and more importantly, the *analogia fidei* is itself an inherently dialectical concept, grounded in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in revelation. Third, dialectic and analogy are not comparable categories. When von Balthasar spoke of a turn away from dialectic he had in mind the dialectical form or method of Barth's theology in the early 1920s. But the *analogia fidei* was not a theological method of this sort.[6] Fourth, McCormack argues that to describe Barth's development in terms of a turn from dialectic to analogy privileges form over content; it therefore ignores the shift which McCormack wishes to emphasize, from the predominance of eschatology to the predominance of Christology.

The third aspect of the challenge to the standard view is the most important, though, for it presents a more radical alternative. It doubts whether it is correct at all to speak of a second decisive shift in Barth's theology,

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[4] Doubts had existed about the 'standard view' even before the Göttingen dogmatics came to the awareness of scholars. See for example Eberhard Jüngel's important article of 1982 'Von der Dialektik zur Analogie: Die Schule Kierkegaards und der Einspruch Petersons', in *Barth-Studien* (Benziger Verlag, Zürich and Köln, and Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh, 1982), 127-79. Two volumes of the Göttingen lectures have been published in the Gesamtausgabe as *'Unterricht in der christlichen Religion', i. Prolegomena, 1924* ed. H. Reiffen, (TVZ, Zürich, 1985), and *'Unterricht in der christlichen Religion', ii. Die Lehre von Gott/ Die Lehre vom Menschen, 1924/1925* ed. H. Stoevesandt, (TVZ, Zürich, 1990). English translation of vol. i. and part of vol. ii, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion vol.1* trans. G.W. Bromiley, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids), 1991.

[5] Bruce L. McCormack *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995). See pp. 16-20.

[6] To this extent it might have been less misleading to speak of a turn from dialectic to dogmatic method.

comparable with his break with liberalism in 1915.[7] Barth's development, it is suggested, involved nothing which could be thought of as a second conversion: it should be seen, rather, as a gradual process in which Barth, in various ways, struggled to give expression to an essentially unchanging core conviction. McCormack regards this as a new view of Barth's development, and attributes a good deal of the credit for it to Ingrid Spieckermann's 1985 study *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths*.[8] Spieckermann sees Barth's development after 1915 as "a more or less continuous unfolding of a single material insight or intention".[9] The picture then is of continuing developments, but no radical shifts, no change of direction comparable with the initial break. It emphasizes both the continuity between the different phases of Barth's thought, and the gradual nature of its development throughout his life. The important thing about this type of account of Barth's development is its implication that there is in all of Barth's post-1915 theology an essentially constant core, an initial insight that lay at the heart of his theological revolution, and indeed of his later dogmatic theology. If this is in fact the case, then the identification and description of this core is clearly one of the most important tasks for students of any aspect of Barth's work.

Before going on to consider this issue, though, it should be noted that the view of Barth's development as a "more or less continuous unfolding of a single material insight or intention" is not as new as McCormack suggests. Such a model in fact appears in von Balthasar's study, written some 35 years earlier. To this extent McCormack's criticisms of the standard view of Barth's development are aimed largely at the wrong target. He fails to acknowledge that von Balthasar, despite his talk of a second "decisive turning point" and his association of this with the Anselm book, actually

[7] It should be pointed out that McCormack's arguments, which are on the whole accurate, do not establish that there was no second decisive shift in Barth's thought: they simply establish that it is inadequate to speak of such a shift as being from dialectic to analogy. They suggest two alternative descriptions of a turning point, in fact: a shift in method, from dialectic to dogmatic form; and a shift in content, from eschatology to Christology. What is not established so far is whether *these* shifts are gradual or sudden, or indeed whether they are major or minor changes in direction.

[8] Ingrid Spieckermann *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1985).

[9] McCormack, *CRDT*, 9. See Spieckermann, ibid. 72-82.

offered a much more subtle and nuanced account than such phrases suggest when abstracted from their context. In fact the origin of the 'standard view' probably owed more to Barth's own retrospective descriptions of his development than to von Balthasar. The latter certainly, like most scholars of the time, was poorly informed about some aspects of the history of Barth's writings.[10] He lacked any knowledge of Barth's first dogmatics lectures in Göttingen, for example; on such points recent writers have been able to supplement and correct his account. But his talk of two "decisive turning points" should not be taken out of context; it was strongly qualified by its occurrence in the course of an account which affirmed the gradual nature of Barth's development, and which emphasized the considerable continuity underlying different stages of development. For example the quotation above comparing Barth's shifts to Augustine's conversions is followed closely in the text by the comment that Barth's second conversion "took place after a nearly ten-year struggle, sometime around 1930".[11] Later he notes that "Barth did not suddenly replace dialectics with analogy. We cannot isolate any one particular text as the sign of this shift, for it happened gradually. ... Our watchword must be 'development' ".[12] Only in the late 1940s does this change really bear fruit fully in the *Church Dogmatics*, he suggests. So while von Balthasar does talk of Barth's second conversion, on closer examination he qualifies this considerably. Strictly speaking, he sees it as a process which began around 1920 and continued for perhaps thirty years.

As for the continuity underlying the different stages of Barth's development, von Balthasar had this to say early on:

> It is now quite clear that the material content of his [Barth's] *Church Dogmatics* is radically different from his earlier writings. But can the same

[10] There was of course no Barth Archive in 1951, nor a Gesamtausgabe. Having access to the living Karl Barth was perhaps a poor substitute, so far as accurate historical information about his earlier work was concerned!

[11] Von Balthasar op. cit. 93. I have, however, followed McCormack's translation (see *CRDT*, p. 1) on this one occasion as Oakes' rendering is misleading. The important point, though, is von Balthasar's recognition that Barth's development throughout the whole decade of the twenties involved a struggle to liberate himself from previous thought-forms, a process which issued in and was completed by the clarification he felt he had achieved in his study of Anselm. The Anselm book is therefore linked to a long-term process of development.

[12] Ibid. 107.

> be said of the formal principles of this theology? This is a question to which we will have to return, but we can say for the moment that the answer must be No. Despite the far-reaching evolution of his work, Barth has remained true to his own deepest intuitions. The insight of the beginning has been maintained through all the vicissitudes of his career. True, this insight has found numerous and various conceptual and verbal expressions over the years, with earlier foundations partially scoured and cleaned; but as this image implies, it was all for the purpose of clarifying, purifying and preserving his original intuition. If we assume this is true, our first task will be to look for the enduring constants supporting the whole of Barthian theology. We must search for the ultimate intuition, the deepest passion that animates him, that fiery vision that has set loose such an immense work and had such an impact.[13]

This picture of Barth's development as a process of finding new ways of expressing an original and constant intuition is indeed operative throughout the book. For example the conclusion of von Balthasar's discussion of Barth's dialectical period is that the second *Romans* did not and could not say what Barth had wanted it to say. The shift that followed was necessary to enable the expression of the same intuition which dialectical theology had tried to give voice to.[14] Later again von Balthasar says that the bell which had resounded in the second *Romans* "carried such force that it would continue to echo in everything that Barth would later write. The ultimate purpose of so prophetic a thinker and preacher could never really change."[15] Interpreters who argue against talk of a second "decisive turning point" in Barth's theology, in favour of continuity and gradual development, may in fact find that they have been anticipated or even outdone by von Balthasar.[16]

Von Balthasar's high estimation of the continuity between different stages of Barth's thought therefore confirms the importance of the question already identified: what was the fundamental intuition, the "insight of the beginning" that lay at the heart of all Barth's theology? What was the

[13] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 24-5.

[14] Ibid. 85.

[15] Ibid. 168. Also important in this connection is the short chapter "On Interpreting Barth" (59-63) which lays out von Balthasar's determination to relate Barth's earlier and later work reciprocally.

[16] I have not yet mentioned, either, what is perhaps his most radical acknowledgment of the continuity between the different stages of Barth's theology. I mean by this his opinion that the central lines of Barth's theology can be found in significant measure in his publications prior to his conscious break with liberal theology, in 1915. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

enduring constant that Barth sought all his life to express? Von Balthasar's initial answer to this question is to describe it as a passion which: "if we were to give ... [it] a name, we could not do other than call it Barth's consuming zeal for God".[17] On its own, this is perhaps rather opaque. However it is offered merely as the marker for further explanation, which von Balthasar goes on promptly to provide. His first explanation is that this zeal is what Barth sought to express in his adoption of Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative distinction". Implied in it then is a sense of the distinction between God and creation. Its early expression took the form of "a relativizing of everything that was not divine".[18] This sense of creaturely relativity was never dropped, though. Von Balthasar summarizes the view of Barth's mature theology: "Even creaturely truth and goodness and beauty are relative: they come from God and return to him. In themselves they have no consistency, no power, no meaning, no existence."[19]

God's absoluteness and creaturely relativity: these are the form of Barth's zeal.[20] The development from *Romans* to *Church Dogmatics* was necessary because God's absoluteness tended in the earlier work to threaten to annihilate the creature. The later work expressed God's absoluteness as absolute love, in which God's Yes and No, judgement and grace, are both located. For this reason, the key to Barth's mature theology, and therefore to all his theology, is his doctrine of predestination. The relativity of the creature and the absoluteness of God are able to be affirmed only when God's absoluteness is understood as love, in which his election and rejection of the creature are both grounded. Therefore "seen in the perspective of revelation, the doctrine of election is the *summa evangelii* ... It is the key for understanding all of God's revelation in creation, reconciliation and redemption".[21] In this regard too von Balthasar affirms the continuity of Barth's thought. He says of volume II/2 of the *Church Dogmatics*, which deals with this doctrine, "Without doubt, it is the most magnificent, unified

[17] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 168.
[18] Ibid. 169.
[19] Ibid. 169.
[20] It is worth noting that McCormack's answer to the question of the original intuition animating Barth's theology is essentially the same, even if he uses a different formula. See *CRDT*, 134: he offers the Barthian phrase "God is God" as the key, explaining its significance as indicating "the sharp distinction ... between God and humankind".
[21] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 174.

and well-grounded section of the whole work. Written with the greatest love, it is the heartbeat of his whole theology".[22] But he also at the same time affirms the early origin of Barth's distinctive view of election, stating that it was fully formed even in the first edition of *Romans*.

ii. Barth's earliest theology: 1909 - 1914.

One of the most important aspects of von Balthasar's answer has not yet been addressed, however. I am referring to his discussion of the principal theological writings Barth published prior to his break with liberalism. That von Balthasar should have turned to these writings is not in itself surprising: the question of the "insight of the beginning" inevitably implies an investigation of Barth's theological beginnings. The presentation of Barth's theological development as a gradual unfolding of an essentially constant theme calls for study of the initial break in which this theme emerged, and of the theology that preceded that break.[23] What *is* surprising, perhaps, is that von Balthasar finds Barth's zeal well rooted in the early material. He says:

> The publications of this time (up until about 1916) show, of course, that he [Barth] was in the mainstream of the then-prevailing liberal theology. But, remarkably enough, many of the outlines of his later writings are clearly discernible.[24]

In order to appreciate the grounds of von Balthasar's claim, it is necessary to consider the views which the young Barth espoused, and their context in the theological and philosophical landscape of the period. The most important context for Barth's first theology was the Marburg neo-Kantianism of Paul Natorp and Hermann Cohen, and the theological appropriation of this by

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[22] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 174.

[23] It is not surprising that the new emphasis on this model in recent scholarship has been accompanied by renewed interest in Barth's earliest writings. See for example McCormack, *CRDT*, 68-77 and 104-7; Spieckermann *Gotteserkenntnis*, 21f.; Cornelis van der Kooi *Anfängliche Theologie Der Denkweg des jungen Karl Barth* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1987), 21-61; Steven G. Smith *The Argument to the Other: Reason beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas* (Scholars Press, California, 1983), 13-20; Simon Fisher *Revelatory Positivism? Barth's Earliest Theology and the Marburg School* (O.U.P., Oxford, 1988), 170 ff; and, a little earlier, George Hunsinger in Hunsinger (ed.) *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976), 192-198.

[24] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 210.

Barth's teacher Wilhelm Herrmann.[25] Cohen, like Kant before him, envisaged philosophy as a discipline which could provide a secure grounding for scientific knowledge by carrying out a critique of thought. He followed Kant in adopting a transcendental method, but departed radically from Kant in his understanding and employment of this. The distinction is clearest, perhaps, in neo-Kantianism's refusal to accept Kant's split between the *noumenal* and the *phenomenal*. Cohen, following in the footsteps of post-Kantian idealism, regarded Kant's notion of the *Ding an sich*, the thing-in-itself, as unacceptable; if we have no knowledge of the thing as such, lying behind our perception of it, then the positing of such things-in-themselves is unjustifiable. They become an "ontological quirk and an epistemological monstrosity".[26] Cohen's transcendental method therefore insisted on a complete identification of being with knowledge: to be is is to be thought, and also to be known. "Being, he [Cohen] suggested, achieves existence by becoming thought, and the two are held together by a dynamic, never ending, process of knowing."[27] Being has its origin in the judging activity of the mind: "Cohen's theory of judgement could well be termed a generative theory of judgement. ... When thought judges it produces knowledge and being."[28] As Fisher notes this gives it an originary power analogous to traditional notions of divine creation *ex nihilo*:

> In several writings Kant contrasted human cognition with the sort of intellectual cognition which, according to the rationalist schools, characterizes the mind of the maker. The former was called by Kant *intuitus derivativus*, since human knowledge depends upon there being something in existence for it to discover and, by implication, upon empirical intuition. Divine intuition, being *intuitus originarius*, is not so dependent. It is *originarius* because it creates the objects of its knowledge *ex nihilo* or from its own thought. With Cohen's philosophy human thought becomes *originarius* in that it is creative and productive.[29]

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25 A useful account of neo-Kantianism, of Hermann's theology, and their relevance for Barth's early theology is Simon Fisher's *Revelatory Positivism?* What follows is indebted to his treatment.

26 Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism?*, 34. Cohen did not, however, reject the concept of the noumenon altogether, but reinterpreted it as a law through which we understand experience. A useful account of this is given in John Lyden's article 'The Influence of Hermann Cohen on Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology', in *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992), 168 f.

27 Fisher, ibid. 22.

28 Ibid. 26.

29 Ibid. 41-2.

One problem for neo-Kantianism, though, was the question of how to treat religion. The Marburg critique of thought divided knowledge into logic, ethics and aesthetics. If religion was to be accounted for and grounded, in this system, it presumably would have to be under one of these three headings. Cohen's early writings attempted to deal with religion under the category of ethics.[30] Natorp, however, resisted the urge to subsume religion under one of the three categories, embracing instead a theory of religious feeling as the "inaccessible source of everything that makes personal experience authentically human".[31] Neither solution allowed religion any independent ground outwith the prescribed categories of knowledge.

As Fisher notes, Wilhelm Herrmann, who taught theology at Marburg from 1879 to 1917, was in large measure a Ritschlian. His theology was shaped by the Ritschlian dualism between *Natur* and *Geist*, by its rejection of metaphysical speculation about the ontological status of objects of experience, and by its Melanchthonian epistemology, in which God is known in the benefits of Christ in the believer. His response to Marburg neo-Kantianism was to insist on the autonomy of religion, the impossibility of accounting for it by a system of scientific knowledge. It deals, he argued, with a reality "of a totally different order from anything encountered by philosophy or *Wissenschaft*".[32] Fisher describes this as a dualism of faith, going against the monism of Marburg philosophy. Herrmann's work, though strongly influenced by neo-Kantianism, constituted a robust dialogue with his philosopher colleagues. It insisted that religion involves an actual experience of divine reality, which cannot be treated as an objectless feeling nor subsumed under the categories of logic, ethics and aesthetics. What is decisive in the realm of religion is the individual's experience of God in faith, in the event of revelation; and as such, religion is immune from the critical powers of scientific philosophy.

Herrmann's acceptance of neo-Kantianism could not be uncritical; in fact it reversed the direction of its epistemology: "Instead of thought generating reality from the tasks it sets itself, faith, being an experience in which

30 See Fisher, op. cit. 73. See also Lyden, op. cit. 171.
31 Fisher, ibid. 73.
32 Ibid. 135.

something real is given and known, generates conceptual forms for expressing the new reality it has encountered."[33] Herrmann therefore regarded conceptualizations of religious faith as expressions of individual experience. The truth and meaning of such conceptualizations are therefore tied to the experience, and are not matters of knowledge of a type which could be subjected to scientific scrutiny. They are not laws of religious truth but "personal testimonies of religious experience".[34] This, of course, leaves theology in something of an ambiguous position. How is theology possible as a discipline with any general validity if its statements are tied to individual experience? Herrmann, perhaps inevitably, developed a dualism here to match his dualism of faith: theology is to be seen as a heterogeneous discipline, with its own kind of validity.

This, then, is the theological and intellectual context which had the strongest effect on the young Barth. The last semester of his student years was spent in Marburg in 1908, and he stayed on for a further year as assistant to the editor of *Die Christliche Welt*, Martin Rade. His first important venture into theological print was in an article written in 1909, during his stay in Marburg. Entitled "Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit", and published in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, it was promptly supplemented by a further article in which Barth defended his views against critical responses by E.C. Achelis and P. Drews, professors at Marburg and Halle respectively.[35] The background to the article was some recent discussion of why so few graduates of faculties associated with modern theology went into foreign mission work, compared with graduates of theologically conservative faculties. Barth argued that modern theology, lacking authoritative normative statements of faith, makes the transition into pastoral work much harder for its students. This is something which Barth thought required to be acknowledged and faced realistically. He was not advocating a conservative position, though, nor saying that modern theology makes students unable to undertake practical work. As Bruce McCormack puts it, the essay "fairly bristles with Barth's sense of

[33] Fisher, op. cit. 154-5.
[34] Ibid. 155.
[35] "Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit", in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* vol. 19, (1909), 317-21 and 'Antwort an D. Achelis und D. Drews', ibid. 479-86.

superiority to both those on the theological right ... and those modern students on the left who jump ship at the first available opportunity".[36] Barth was not, then, expressing doubts about liberal theology as such; on the contrary he shows a sufficiently firm commitment to it to be able to see the difficulties it implies for practical pastoral work, and yet to advocate it enthusiastically.

Looking back on his university studies, Barth says that he takes two things from them out into the world: "religious individualism and historical relativism." Religious experience is necessarily individual. As such, Barth denies that there is any objectifiable or demonstrable revelation which one person could convey to another. But in and through its strictly personal character, religious experience is an absolute standard. This means in consequence that there is no absolute standard in historical or cultural existence. The two principles of religious individualism and historical relativism are linked. And the relativism is thorough. Barth says: "We apply historical relativism to our own theology as well, and, when we compare it to others, we see it as but one manifestation of the gospel alongside others."[37] In his subsequent defence of his views Barth quoted Schleiermacher to support his view of religious experience: "Everywhere our thoughts are the changeable epiphenomena behind which lies the inner unchangeable reality that can never itself be conveyed as such."[38] Von Balthasar comments: "The whole of this first essay is dominated by the idea of the radicalism of the nontangibility, the nonobjectivity of religious reality."[39]

The theological debts in this first essay are quite clearly to Herrmann, and to the the latter's critical engagement with neo-Kantianism. Von Balthasar's claim that Barth was in the mainstream of the prevailing liberal theology at this time seems to be justified. What, though, about his suggestion that important elements of Barth's later thought can be discerned? He is surely correct here also. The primary theme of the essay is the combination of

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[36] McCormack, *CRDT*, 70.
[37] Barth, *MTR*, 321. Quoted by von Balthasar, op. cit. 210.
[38] Ibid. 482. Quoted by von Balthasar, op. cit. 210.
[39] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 211.

historical relativism and of a religious individualism, both of which arise from the incommunicable quality of religious reality. Von Balthasar, it will be recalled, described the combination of creaturely relativity and divine absoluteness as the form of Barth's 'zeal'. It is not therefore an insignificant, incidental aspect of Barth's later theology that is foreshadowed here, but rather its very core. The 'insight of the beginning' is itself rooted in the Herrmannian theology of the young Barth. This gives rise to a difficulty, though. How can Barth's theological revolution, apparently so opposed to the liberal theology of his teachers, have as its central insight something rooted in that liberal theology? The answer to this is complex, and certainly should include attention to the fact that the religious individualism of this early essay was not preserved in the emphasis on divine absoluteness which was characteristic of Barth's later theology. Also essential for a satisfactory answer, though, is some recognition of the extent to which Barth's Herrmannian theology was a restless theology, marked by tensions which can be seen, with the benefit of hindsight, to have propelled him onwards towards a quite different position.

To this extent it cannot be ignored that these essays, despite their enthusiasm for a Herrmannian theological position, are preoccupied with the problems which arise from that position. Chief among these is Barth's recognition that practical pastoral and missionary work requires some account of doctrine which can function as a norm for faith; without such a norm practical work becomes a quite different and "incomparably more difficult" task. These essays demonstrate Barth's remarkable sensitivity to the practical problems that follow from a Herrmannian theology, with a dualism between nature and religion and a consequent tension between divine revelation and the relativity of all attempts to set out religious truth in speech. This is not, I would repeat, to call into question Barth's commitment to a Herrmannian theology. On the contrary the difficulties that Barth highlights follow from his desire to be a consistent and honest

follower of Herrmann's theology.[40] But nonetheless it is remarkable that Barth advocates a Herrmannian theology not as the solution to the problem of how to live and speak as a Christian in the modern world, but as the source of a problem about these things, a problem which he has no solution for but which must be acknowledged and faced.

I am suggesting, then, that problems inherent in Herrmann's theology were very much connected with Barth's subsequent theological development. Two aspects of Herrmann's theology are particularly relevant. The first is the extremity of the dualism it established between religious and scientific knowledge. The second is the extraordinary weight that this dualism placed on the possession of the requisite individual religious experience. Herrmann's epistemological dualism amounted to an attempt to establish a barrier behind which the corrosive powers of modern scientific and philosophical criticism could not reach. The consequence of this dualism was that the whole of the natural realm was handed over to scientific study without reserve. No religious knowledge could be gained from the natural sciences or from critical historical study. It could only come from a revelation which "cannot be objectively explained, but ... can certainly be experienced in man's own self, namely, in the non-objectifiable subjectivity of the dark, defenceless depths in which we live the moment of involvement".[41] The narrowness and impassability of these boundaries causes the problem: even the attempt to articulate religious experience in words crosses the boundary, passing over into the realm of relativity. Barth put it this way in his *Antwort*: "the normative, objective, eternal lies only in

[40] McCormack is right to emphasise that Barth was fully committed to the liberal theology of Herrmann, noting the comment in Barth's correspondence to Martin Rade that "the picture of the perplexed candidate who [stands] at the edge of despair ... does not fit me". (See *CRDT*, 70.) Fisher (see *Revelatory Positivism?* 173 and also 207, note 11) is also right to reject the view that "the earliest writings of Barth represent a brief half-hearted flirtation with a liberalism which meant very little to their author", a view which, he notes, has been influential in Britain and America. Barth's immersion in Herrmann's theology, and in the thought-world which gave rise to it, was deep; and his commitment to such a theology was manifestly strong. What I am suggesting was that there were in this theology, as in all theologies, certain tensions and problems; and that Barth was both particularly sensitive to these and unusually willing to acknowledge and face them. In this regard, it is worth noting that Barth stated, inthe concluding sentence of his *Antwort*, that "a theology which has life within it not only tolerates but demands that its problems be recognized and openly expressed." See *Antwort*, 386.

[41] This is part of Jürgen Moltmann's description of Herrmann in *Theology of Hope* trans. J.W. Leitch, (SCM Press, London, 1967), 52. Quoted by Fisher op. cit. 145.

the 'affection' of this inner experience. Everything which is set forth in thoughts and words belongs itself once again to the relativizing stream of history and is, as that which passes away, only a parable."[42] A theology which has as much difficulty as this in making space for religious speech is likely to be unstable. The other consequence of this dualism, though, was that the individual's experience of God became the keystone on which the whole of religion depended. Barth himself captured something of the precariousness of this theology when he noted Gottfried Keller's mockery of theologians who "sit themselves on the topmost branch of a tree, from which they will one day fall down with a great crash".[43] Without the "personal living reality" of individual religion, Barth noted, one is indeed in great danger of falling down "with a great crash".

Barth's commitment to a Herrmannian theology is equally evident in his second significant publication in this period. This was a lecture given in Neuenburg in 1910, and published in an expanded version in two parts in 1912 under the title "Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte".[44] Its preoccupation, once again, is the connected dual principles of historical relativism and absolute but incommunicable religious reality. Barth describes his aim as follows:

> While fully presupposing and recognizing historical relativism, we wish to establish a uniquely religious and theological methodology based on such relativism by virtue of which there can emerge an absolute relation to absolute history, by virtue of which faith and revelation can occur.[45]

Barth rejects any attempt to use historical data as an objective norm by means of which the historical personality of Jesus can be reached and form a basis for faith. He therefore rejects both the biblicism of the Reformers and the Roman Catholic understanding of the episcopal Magisterium. The modern age realizes the relativity of all historical data, and there can be no return behind this recognition. But nor is it desirable to return to a heteronomous understanding of religious knowledge. Kant has succeeded

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[42] *Antwort*, 484. Quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 72.
[43] Barth, *MTR*, 319.
[44] "Die Christliche Glaube und die Geschichte", in *Schweitzerische Theologische Zeitschrift*, (1912), 1-18 and 49-72.
[45] Ibid. 4. Quoted by von Balthasar op. cit. 211.

"in rescuing the autonomy of consciousness from the crust of the coercive culture of the Middle Ages. ... There is only *one* way of knowing and that is the knowledge of critical rationalism."[46] The principle of historical relativism is not, then, a threat to proper religious authority but a liberation into the realm of autonomous knowledge. Faith is not touched by this relativism, for it is not to be identified with any particular thoughts occurring in religious history. It is, rather, "experience of God [*Gotteserlebnis*], an immediate awareness of the presence and efficacy of the power of life".[47] It is to be contrasted with the knowledge classified by Cohen under the categories of logic, ethics and aesthetics. The resulting problem of the apparent lack of relation between faith and history is tackled by Barth, as by Herrmann, by means of a reinvention of history in which a kind of empathy enables one to see as the biblical authors saw, and to catch sight of the inner life of Jesus through his effect on those who witness to him. Understood in this way, history and faith are identical. The living experience of God means ultimately the identity of the life of the believer with the life of Christ. Yet this cannot be the result of scientific investigation - it can exist only by means of God's revelation: "The feeling that God brings about, his justification, his *deed* of election, all these arise *in* the [subjective] intuition and seeing of God's efficacious work".[48]

The only substantial theological text Barth produced during his early years in Safenwil was a lecture entitled "Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott".[49] Once again Barth's debt to neo-Kantianism and to Herrmann are evident; once again elements of his later theology are anticipated; and once again his awareness of the tensions inherent in a Herrmannian theology is plain. As in the two earlier works, the focus is on a specific and intractable problem which arises in a Herrmannian theology: this time it is the problem of how to relate the notions of divine personality and absoluteness, both of which seem to belong to the concept of God, and seem to be demanded by religious experience. Personality and absoluteness cannot, though, be reconciled conceptually, since personality inherently involves limitation and

[46] Barth, *CGG*, 17. Quoted by von Balthasar op. cit. 212.
[47] Ibid. 5. Quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 74-5.
[48] Ibid. 53.
[49] Originally a lecture delivered at a pastoral conference in May 1913, published in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1914), 21-32, 65-95.

change. The idea of 'Absolute Personality' has, as D.F. Strauss pointed out, to be regarded as nonsense.[50] Yet neither concept can be abandoned; the only solution is to allow them both to stand, despite the conceptual contradiction. Von Balthasar summarizes Barth's position in this way:

> all that remains to us is to hover between the *sic et non* of two unacceptable alternatives: between the forbidden frontier of pantheism, which would strip God of all personal attributes, and the forbidden boundary of deism, which would like to subsume God's personality within the finitude of the world. Between these two impossible alternatives we must content ourselves with the ambiguous center, with that *sic et non* that we are never allowed to cover over with a false apologetic synthesis.[51]

Barth's willingness to contemplate a 'non-solution' of this nature is striking. As before, his desire is to avoid a false synthesis of distinct principles. There is no attempt to discover a fundamental identity underlying the manifest difference. Instead the antinomy, and the unrest which it produces, have to be accepted as they stand. Not surprisingly this view is connected once again with the notion that what can be experienced in a living encounter with God cannot be articulated conceptually. The problematic relation between religious experience and dogmatic theological formulation comes to the fore again. Barth's attitude is not that conceptualizations of faith should be abandoned in view of their inadequacy; on the contrary he is acutely aware of the need to articulate faith. As Steven G. Smith puts it, Barth's view is that "Dogmatics is a secondary pursuit but a necessary one."[52] He quotes Barth's view in this lecture of the scientific character of theology:

> The scientific character of dogmatics cannot consist in the freedom from contradiction of the most harmonious system possible, but in the most exact interpretation possible of religious reality by its propositions, and in the greatest possible purity and completeness of thought. In this respect Calvin's *Institutio* is more scientific than most of what has been written in

[50] Barth, *GPG*, 80.
[51] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 216.
[52] Smith, op. cit. 17.

dogmatics since.[53]

iii. The nature of Barth's break with liberalism.

Two questions arise from this brief study of Barth's early theology. First, given the presence in this early period not only of elements of Barth's later theology, but of an early form of what is arguably the central insight of that mature theology, what precisely did his break with liberalism consist in? Secondly, why did that break take place? The first of these questions can be answered quite simply. Herrmann's theology had been an attempt to draw a boundary around religion, beyond which scientific and philosophical criticism could not reach;[54] Barth's revolution was to consist in the collapse of confidence in the possession of the experience of God, which had been the jewel so carefully guarded by Herrmannian boundaries. In other words there was nothing left behind the defences. The sense of possession of God was replaced by a sense that we do not have God. Barth's reference to those theologians who sit on the topmost branch of a tree proved in due course to be prophetic. Without confidence in the possession of the requisite religious experience, his previous theology was left in the most precarious position. Even more than before, religion and theology were now understood to be part of the world of relativity; for Barth no longer had any confidence in a

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[53] Barth, *GPG*, 23f. Quoted by Smith, op. cit. p. 17. It is notable that Barth affirms dogmatics as something which aims not at the logical clarity of a philosophical system, but at a rational character derived from the nature of its particular object. His recognition of the merits of Calvin in this regard, and in contrast to more recent dogmatics, is also significant. It would not be too strong to say that this lecture anticipates the understanding of scientific dogmatics which informed Barth's mature theology. See *CD* I/1, 1-11 and 315-330 in particular. It is also interesting to note von Balthasar's observation that in this lecture (written in 1913, it must be remembered) there is discernible the first formulation of a doctrine of the analogy of faith. He quotes: "We cannot find an analogy to the real content of religious belief in God in the human personality. ... No concept of God that arises from projecting human awareness onto the transcendent can ever reach the reality of God, let alone describe it exhaustively. Religion's thinking about God cannot be something projected from within ourselves; it can only be the reflection of a fact that has been created and projected *into us*. This fact is *life in God*, which is granted to us through our *connectedness to history*. This inner connection to history is religious experience. In it we possess God, and because of it we can speak of God." (*GPG*, 89. Quoted by von Balthasar, op. cit. 216.) It seems to me that this thought is probably associated with Barth's absorption of the ideas contained in his brother Heinrich's dissertation *Descartes Begründung der Erkenntnis* (Max Drechsel, Bern, 1913). See also chapter 3 below.

[54] See Fisher, op. cit. 146-7: "It is no understatement to affirm that Herrmann's theology aspired to protect the integrity and efficacy of divine activity in revelation from the sophisticated idealizations of the Marburg Philosophers."

privileged realm of religious experience, in which the gulf between faith and history could be bridged.[55] Still present was an emphasis on revelation as the ground of our knowledge of God, and on the subjectivity of God in revelation; but without confidence in the unity of revelation and faith in immediate experience. A dualism remained, though its purpose was radicalized. It did not serve to guard the distinctness and integrity of the immediate experience of God, but rather to emphasize the otherness of God and the world of God. If the problems in a Herrmannian theology were the extremity of its dualism and the consequent emphasis on religious experience, Barth's revolution was to consist in a breach at the second of these points; overcoming the first of these was something that lay further in the future, in the rise to prominence of the notion of God's act of election, and of the ground it provides for our discourse.

The second question remains, though. Why did this break take place? It would be wrong to suggest that an answer can be given solely in terms of internal problems of a Herrmannian theology. External factors undoubtedly played an important part. There were political factors associated with the outbreak of War, not least the dual disillusionments which resulted from the manifesto by ninety-three intellectuals in support of the War (which included Wilhelm Herrmann's signature), and the initial support of the German Social Democratic Party for the War. There were factors such as Barth's involvement with Religious Socialism, and his visit to Christoph Blumhardt in April 1915. There were intellectual and theological factors such as his renewed study of Kant and his decision to engage in intensive study of the Bible, and in particular Paul's epistle to the Romans. However I want to argue that the tensions inherent in a Herrmannian theology were also a significant factor. This is not to say that Barth's espousal of this theology in his early writings was half-hearted; nor is it to commit myself to the view that nineteenth century theology as a whole, and Herrmann's in particular, was undermined to an unusual degree by internal inconsistencies. I do not, to take one example, agree with Stephen Webb's

[55] Steven G. Smith says "There are hints in these wartime writings of a polemic against Schleiermacher, Marburg and religious socialism, but what we find for the most part is a sudden vacuum in the place where these were taken for granted not long before." Smith, op. cit. 23.

judgement that Barth's early essays were intimations of his "gradual dissatisfaction with theological modernism".[56] Webb's claim ignores the extent of the common ground between Barth and Herrmann, and misunderstands Barth's purpose in his early articles, which was not to dissent from Herrmann's approach to theology but to try to achieve better understanding of its implications and problems.

It is, however, instructive that such misunderstandings occur. They are perhaps caused not just by the fact that Barth's early essays focus on problems for a Herrmannian theology: all theological schemes have their inconsistencies and problems, after all, and these provide a focus for the efforts of that theology's advocates, as well as its critics. What surely contributes to misunderstandings is the fact that the problems Barth identifies are so intractable, and the 'solutions' he offers are not really solutions at all. This is particularly true of 'Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit', in which the difficulties created by modern theology for theological conceptualization, and hence for practical pastoral work, have to be acknowledged and faced; and it is equally true of 'Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott', in which conflicting elements in religious experience lead to a contradiction at the level of thought, which cannot be dissolved in a higher synthesis. Even in "Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte" the Schleiermacherian solution proposed by Barth to the relation of faith and history (presupposing the ultimate unity of *Anschauung*, the subjective apprehension of God's work, and feeling *Gefühl*, the objective taking effect of God's work in us) is something which can only take place as God's act. As von Balthasar puts it, "we leap from the relativity of history into the absolute by a kind of Platonic 'vision' of this life as it 'shines through' the documents and by the simple fact that this life proves to be efficacious".[57] This is a solution which arguably redefines the problem rather than solves it. It becomes a problem not of the relation of faith to history but of inner history to outer history, and therefore once again a problem of relating absoluteness to relativity.

[56] Webb, op. cit. 55. Nor do I accept his claim on the previous page that "even at an early stage, he [Barth] showed signs of tension with and dissent from liberalism".
[57] Von Balthasar, op. cit. 214.

One would be justified in concluding that Barth was particularly sensitive to, and willing to acknowledge, the most intractable problems of modern theology. Solutions, where they are available, are only present in immediate lived-experience; discursive theology has to live with the paradoxes. One problem which cannot therefore be resolved is the position of discursive speech: religious experience drives us to think and speak, but discursive thought and speech are inevitably inadequate. The basic difficulty is the one with which Barth began in 1909: the dubious position of the follower of modern theology who wishes to go into practical religious work. Steven G. Smith makes this point:

> It would be a mistake, therefore, to imagine that the Barth who wrote *The Epistle to the Romans* was awakened into critical awareness from a sound 'liberal' dogmatic slumber. His earliest theology is a restless one. The incomparability of Christian existence makes it resistant to the very theological expression it demands.[58]

There is a restlessness in Barth's earliest writings, not because he wavers in his commitment to the theology of his teachers but because he exposes its most intractable problems. This restlessness is chiefly to do with the ambiguous and problematic situation of theology. The dual principles of relativistic historical science and individual religious experience combine to undermine the position and task of the theologian. Theology seeks to be scientific. It aims at "the most exact interpretation possible of religious reality by its propositions, and in the greatest possible purity and completeness of thought".[59] Theology strives after objectivity, in the sense of speaking about its proper object, in a manner which can only be determined by the character of that object. But theology in the modern period knows that it has no way of reaching this object. Faith can occur in the individual in immediate lived-experience, in which the gulf between relativity and absoluteness is overcome. But theology cannot share in this overcoming. It knows that it is excluded. It strives after objectivity but may never attain it. Its only honest option is to speak in a way that acknowledges its own inadequacy. This awareness of the paradoxical situation of modern theology made Barth restless, even prior to his turn away from liberal theology.

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[58] Smith, op. cit. 19.

[59] Barth, *GPG*, 23f.

This restlessness was to be one of the chief reasons for Barth's break with liberalism. It was, however an indirect reason. It placed a weight on religious experience which could not be carried indefinitely. But the collapse of confidence in religious experience was not to resolve the problem of the relation of absoluteness to relativity. On the contrary it made the problem *more* severe, rather than less. It is *after* 1915 that the impossibility of human speech about God comes to full prominence in Barth's writing; it is *after* 1915 (and most strikingly in the second *Romans*) that he strives for a theological method that acknowledges and displays its own inability to speak of God. The matter can perhaps be put like this: a Herrmannian confidence in religious experience was deceptive. Its "supreme confidence"[60] in the experience of God with which this theology went on its way served to conceal that fact that its way was one of retreat. Marburg neo-Kantianism, and behind it the great expansion of scientific endeavour in and since the Enlightenment, had placed theology on the defensive. There was nothing left for theologians like Herrmann and Barth to place their confidence in, other than a realm of experience which was individual, in principle private, and strictly incommunicable.

iv. Safenwil and restless socialism.

There was, however, another side to Barth's theological and pastoral work in his early years in Safenwil, which requires some comment. I am referring to his well documented commitment to and involvement in socialism.[61] Barth later wrote of his arrival in Safenwil:

> Class warfare, which was going on in my parish, before my very eyes, introduced me almost for the first time to the real problems of real life. The result of this was that my main study was now directed towards factory legislation, insurance, trade union affairs and so on, and my energies were

60 See McCormack, *CRDT*, 77.

61 See particularly F.-W. Marquardt *Theologie und Sozialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich, 1972). This admittedly controversial work single-handedly brought the issue of Barth's socialism to the forefront of theological discussion on its publication. Also of particular value is Hunsinger (ed.) *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*. This work includes an account of the controversy provoked by Marquardt's thesis, an article by Marquardt himself summarizing his views, and a variety of responses to his work. It also includes a translation by Hunsinger of Barth's 1911 lecture 'Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung'.

> taken up in disputes sparked off by my support for the workers, not only in the neighbourhood but in the canton.[62]

Barth began to give lectures to the local workers' association, and one of these in particular, delivered on 17th December 1911 and entitled 'Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung', has proved to be of great value for understanding the nature of his socialism and its relation to his theology.[63] Barth's discussion of socialism, both in the lecture and in his subsequent reply to a critical open letter from a local manufacturer, makes clear that he has acquired considerable familiarity with socialist theory.[64] The emphasis in the lecture is on the fact that Barth's approval of socialism is on the basis of its aims, rather than the means which it adopts to try to achieve those aims: "When I talk about the movement for social justice, I am not talking about what some or all Social Democrats are *doing*; I am talking about what they *want*."[65] Barth declares himself to have no desire either to Christianize socialism or to present Jesus as if he were a contemporary socialist; but he regards the aim of socialism and the aim of Jesus as essentially one: "But regarding the goal, social democracy is one with Jesus".[66] Both oppose that "which *ought not to be*". With the *means* employed it is a different matter. Barth praises the method of Jesus: "He worked from the internal to the external. He created new men in order to create a new world. In this direction the present-day social democracy still has infinitely much to learn from Jesus."[67] Barth, though, does not want to spend time criticizing the methods of socialists. He recognizes the inadequacy and relativity of all human strategies: "It is precisely Christians who ought to know that *we all* fall short when we look at what we're *doing*."[68]

One notable feature of Barth's socialism in this lecture is how consistent it is

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62 Quoted by Busch, *Karl Barth*, 69.

63 First published in 'Der Freie Aargauer' in December 1911. Reprinted in the Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe volume *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909-1914* ed. H.-A. Drews and H. Stoevesandt, (Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993), 380-408. ET in Hunsinger op. cit. 19-37.

64 He refers, for example to the economist Werner Sombart's discussion of socialism as well as to the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels. In the reply to Herr Hüssy he refers to the official programme of the Swiss Social Democratic Party.

65 Hunsinger op. cit. 21.

66 Ibid. 28.

67 Ibid. 28.

68 ibid. 21.

with his Herrmannian theology.[69] The principal theological element in the lecture is the identification of the aims of socialism with the aims of Jesus. This depends on the fact that what we obtain from the gospels is a vision of what Jesus wanted; this, of course, is just the sort of connection between faith and history which would derive from a Herrmannian notion of the inner life of Jesus, and which Barth had defended the previous year in his lecture 'Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte'. There seems to me to be another more significant affinity present, though. The lecture reflects, I would suggest, the same problem of the relation of absoluteness and relativity that had preoccupied Barth theologically. It is the distinction between aims and methods that matters here. The aims of Jesus (and the socialists) are an absolute value. But the methods by which these aims may be pursued are inevitably flawed and imperfect, undermined by the fact that in what we *do*, we all fall short.

This problem of the relation between absoluteness and relativity remained at the heart of Barth's socialism. It is particularly evident in a review of the 1913 issue of the journal *Die Hilfe*, a text which George Hunsinger has drawn attention to.[70] Written in the summer of 1914, just before the outbreak of War, the review takes issue with the pragmatism of *Die Hilfe* and its highly respected editor, Friedrich Naumann. Barth acknowledges that practical politics always involve compromise and concession; but he will not allow that a more radical socialist politics is therefore to be dismissed as hopeless idealism. What Barth values in socialism is precisely its radicalism, its deep-rooted critique of the present social order. Radicalism gives social democracy its "revolutionary unrest", its "uncanny greatness".[71] He says:

> But a politics which raises the necessary concessions and compromises to the dignity of generally valid ultimate ideas is very different from a politics which, to be sure, also makes concessions and compromises for the sake of immediate goals ... but in doing so, constantly makes it known: these are provisionalities for which we do not for a minute have any enthusiasm and

[69] Cohen's neo-Kantianism had some connections with socialism. Barth was well aware of this, as is demonstrated by the fact that he at one point attempted to introduce the Safenwil workers' association to Cohen's thought! See Busch, *Karl Barth*, 69.

[70] See his 'Conclusion: Towards a Radical Barth' in Hunsinger, op. cit. 181-233, and in particular 198-9. See also McCormack, *CRDT*, 107-111. The review in question was published in *Die Christliche Welt* 28, (15th August 1914), 774-8.

[71] Barth '*Die Hilfe* 1913', 777-8.

> to which we do not allow ourselves to be tied, because we believe in something greater. It is one thing to become accustomed to the world of relativities, finally becoming completely satisfied and ... at home in them, as those who have no hope. It is another thing altogether, in the midst of this world of relativities, to be incessantly disquieted and full of longing, fundamentally revolutionary vis-à-vis that which exists, longing after the better which will come, after the absolute goal of a human community of life beyond all temporal necessities.[72]

The preference of *Die Hilfe* for moderate reforming socialism over any more radical or revolutionary view incurred Barth's severe displeasure, therefore. For Barth, it was socialism's ability to present the most radical demand to the world that made it valuable. A radical socialism removes the tendency to be too much at home in the world as it is. The difference between social reformism and radical social democracy is a religious difference, rather than a relative difference of political judgement.[73] Barth's earlier distinction between socialism's aims and methods has been radicalized. On the one hand, he recognizes the imperfection and provisionality of life in general, in virtue of which politics inevitably involves compromise and concession, and in virtue of which he himself was willing to engage in reformist social action. But on the other hand he insists on the radical, religious element in socialism which stands in judgement over against the whole of social reality, reformed and unreformed, and in virtue of which we are restless and disquieted, full of longing for a better life, for "a human community of life beyond all temporal necessities".

The basic problem in Barth's socialism is the same as the basic problem of

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72 Barth, *'Die Hilfe* 1913', 776. Quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 109.

73 Barth also affirms in the review his belief that Naumann was misreading the German Social Democratic Party in suspecting that it was moving to a reformist position. He wrote that if he should be wrong in this, and if the SPD was indeed to embrace reformism, this would merely be a disappointment, and not a proof that reformism was the only possible option. Between Barth's writing this review and its publication on 15th August, not only did War break out, but in the Reichstag on the 4th of August the SPD voted with the other parties to grant the Kaiser the financial credits he had sought for the pursual of the War. This was a part of the double disappointment Barth suffered after the outbreak of War, something Marquardt drew attention to (the other part being the declaration of the 93 intellectuals). See Marquardt *Theologie und Sozialismus* op. cit. 120f. Marquardt quotes a retrospective comment of Barth's that the 4th of August 1914 was a "dark day, on which German Social Democracy betrayed socialism". It is interesting to note that Barth was not the only person caught out by the nationalist swing of the SPD. Lenin apparently refused initially to believe the news that the SPD had voted for the approval of the war credits. See Ronald Taylor *Literature & Society in Germany 1918-1945* (Harvester Press, Brighton, Sussex, 1980), 3.

his early theology: how to speak and act, given the absoluteness of God and the divine demand placed upon us. How can we speak theologically and act pastorally given the gulf between absolute divine truth and the relativity of all conceptualizations? And how can we speak and act ethically and politically given the absolute divine demand presented to us and the relative, compromised nature of all that we can in practice do? Religion lives from the experience of the absolute. This experience demands expression, but discursive thought is subject to the relativities of history, and can never be adequate. Theology must therefore speak in the knowledge of its own inadequacy. The contradiction between the experience of the absolute God and the relativity of discursive speech cannot be overcome by a better theology. Socialism lives from and expresses the most radical of demands, in which "the Absolute, God, is taken with seriousness politically".[74] This demand seeks expression, but political action can only ever be relative and provisional. It must be undertaken in the knowledge that it is inadequate. The contradiction between the radicalism of socialism's imperative and the relativity of political action cannot be overcome by working out a better political theory. The structural parallels between Barth's restless theology and his restless socialism are striking. The chief characteristic of each is the tension between an absolute demand and the relativity of the world in which we must live, speak and act.[75]

v. The emergence of a new theology.

It is not my purpose here to give a comprehensive account of the

74 Barth, '*Die Hilfe* 1913', 777.

75 It is worth noting at this point that there are significant similarities between Barth's socialism and Cohen's. See p. 35 below, note 80. Before moving on I would also draw attention to the fact that there were significant divergences between Barth's socialism and his Herrmannian theology during this period. Bruce McCormack has highlighted this: see *CRDT*, 92-104. He points out that even in 'Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung' Barth was critical of the tendency in German theology (Lutheran in particular) to understand religion only as a matter of the relation between the soul and God. Barth's conception of the Kingdom of God in that lecture has departed from his teachers in its overtly political aspect. McCormack notes, too, how Barth's sermons during 1913 contains elements which do not combine well with the theology of his teachers: notably an embryonic critique of religion and an emphasis on divine judgement. He also notes Barth's apprehensions of catastrophe in these sermons. I would add to McCormack's observations that there is a contrast here with Barth's views in 1911. In his reply to Herr Hüssy he had declared a firm belief in "the moral progress of humanity", even describing this belief in progress as the critical issue between him and Herr Hüssy. See Hunsinger, op. cit. 43.

developments in Barth's thought during the early years of the War, or of the two commentaries on Romans which constituted his major works in the War and post-War years.[76] There are, though, aspects of that process of development which are worth commenting on because of their connection with the themes already considered. The first I want to mention is Barth's relation to the rift in Swiss Religious Socialism during the War. The two leading figures in the movement were Hermann Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz. To summarize the situation, and at some risk of over-simplification, Kutter took the more radical stance. He valued the radical element in socialism most, and he saw in Social Democracy an expression of the New Testament's demand for a new world. The Church he believed to have betrayed this with its emphasis on inwardness. However he did not himself take any part in politics. He saw the task of the Church as to proclaim the New Testament message, leaving socialism alone to get on with its opposition in the most radical way possible. Ragaz on the other hand was an ethical socialist who saw the way forward primarily in terms of political action. He believed not in the Marxist account of the inevitable triumph of socialism, but in the necessity of practical action determined by ethical willing. His activism therefore included the desire to transform socialism. From Ragaz's point of view, Kutter was hopelessly quietistic. Kutter, though, regarded Ragaz as engaged in a pointless attempt to Christianize socialism. This tension between the two orientations had been present before the War, but became much more visible under the pressure of responding to the events of 1914.

From what I have already said about Barth's socialism, it is clear that on the question of the attempt to Christianize socialism, he agreed with Kutter. However he also agreed with Ragaz on the necessity of practical political engagement. In fact, in the period prior to and during the early months of the War, Barth found himself closer to Ragaz. He was wary of Kutter's quietism, which seemed to him to cut the religious off from ethical consequences. By the early months of 1915, though, Barth appears to have found the choice between the two much harder to make. In a letter to Thurneysen of 5th February, he recognizes that Kutter's position is more

[76] A good attempt at a comprehensive discussion of this period of Barth's development is provided by McCormack, *CRDT*, 11-290.

radical; but equally he is still suspicious of his quietism, and will not abandon Ragaz's attempt to "bring the religious orientation into connection with practical ethical goals".[77] The following month he speculated on the possibility of a dialectical relation of the two positions, such that a harmonizing of the two might occur. "I believe" he affirmed "in the possibility of such a position even if I cannot yet immediately describe it".[78] But by August of that year Barth, partly influenced by Thurneysen, had begun to sense problems with Ragaz's ideas. He was beginning to see ethical striving, part of the world of relativity under judgement, as something akin to the works of the law. He doubted whether it was possible to have confidence in the connection between our political and ethical works and the Kingdom of God which was their professed goal. "Is it self-evident that 'we' 'represent' the Kingdom of God?" he asked in a letter of 6th August.[79] Barth had clearly shifted towards Kutter's position, and away from Ragaz.

The value of all this for the present discussion is that Barth's changing relation to the two strands in Swiss Religious Socialism, which was closely connected with the development of his own new theological perspective,[80]

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[77] *Karl Barth - Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel: Band i. 1913-1921* ed. E. Thurneysen, (TVZ, Zürich, 1973), 29. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 122.

[78] Ibid. 33. Quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 123.

[79] Ibid. 69-70. Quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 124.

[80] See McCormack, ibid. 124 on this point. With regard to Barth's doubt quoted above he writes: "With this question, the fundamental axiom of Herrmannian theology (the certainty given in religious experience) was now for the first time rendered dubious." I would add, though, that I cannot accept McCormack's claim on the following page that while residues of Barth's earlier thought persisted for some time he "had broken with Marburg for ever". This, I would suggest, is a considerable exaggeration. For one thing, the shift between the two editions of Barth's *Romans* was provoked by his inability to discern the connection between this world and the Kingdom of God in the events around the end of the War. (See below.) This suggests strongly that the 'process eschatology' of the first *Romans* had not broken entirely with Herrmannian and Ragazian assumptions. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 188. It might be better to see Barth's development in this period as a mutation of Herrmannian theology (albeit a radical one) rather than a break with it. See also John Lyden, who points out that Barth's turn away from Herrmann can be seen as a turn *towards* Cohen. Cohen's reinterpretation of the Kantian split between the noumenal and the phenomenal issued in a distinction between the ideal (and real) and the actual. For Cohen, God is real as the ideal unity of the world and morality. This unity is our goal "as we strive to actualize moral ideals in the world." However we "can never actualize this unity fully, so the world and morality remain distinct in our experience." See Lyden, op. cit. 171. The distinction between the ideal and the actual was therefore the ground of Cohen's ethical socialism. Significantly, though, Cohen's distiction is closely related to the distinction between absoluteness and relativity which, I have been arguing, lay at the heart of Barth's theology *and* his socialism.

has close parallels with the problem of absoluteness and relativity already discussed. As before, the difficulty is of how to relate an absolute truth and an absolute demand to practical speech and action in the realm of relativity. As before, Barth's strategy is initially to hold the two alongside one another though he can give no satisfactory account of how they relate. What ties the two together is simply the assumption that we can apprehend the absolute and so be confident that our practical action serves it, albeit imperfectly. What happens in 1915 is that he loses confidence in this apprehension of truth and therefore can no longer be sure that particular practical work does serve the Kingdom of God. Once again, though, this is not a solution to the problem of the relation between absoluteness and relativity. In fact the relation has become even more problematic. Barth's new perspective is a radicalization of the gulf between absolute divine truth and relative conceptualizations, between means and ends, between the new world of God and the old world of human striving.

Barth's changing attitude to Ragaz and Kutter is reflected in his attitude to socialism in this period. His disillusionment with Social Democracy, given its failure to offer a resolute international opposition to the War, did not mean that his political activities ceased. In fact he decided to join the Swiss Social-Democratic Party in January 1915. Writing to Thurneysen to tell him of this, he affirmed that "faith in the Greatest does not exclude but rather includes within it work and suffering in the realm of the imperfect".[81] Yet by the beginning of the following year it is clear that Barth's shift in understanding has begun to undermine his commitment to practical political action. In a letter to Thurneysen of 1st January 1916, Barth wrote that he was giving weekly lectures to workers on practical social issues; but while, he says, he still believes in the necessity of such things, he gives the lectures "without enthusiasm, ... because I cannot as yet get on to the one thing necessary".[82] The shift in Barth's socialism can perhaps even be described as an increasingly eschatological understanding of its demands. In a lecture delivered in December 1915, he stated that he valued socialism because it points beyond materialistic and nationalistic thinking, beyond all

[81] In a letter of 5th February 1915. See *B-Th. Br. I.* 30.

[82] *B-Th. Br. I.* 122. ET in *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth - Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914 - 1925* ed. and trans. James D. Smart, (Epworth, London, 1964), 36.

attitudes which believe more strongly in the present than the future. "Despite all its [socialism's] imperfections - one can talk about them quite calmly and openly - it is to me one of the most encouraging signs that God's kingdom does not stand still and that God is at work."[83]

Only in the summer of 1916, however, does a serious development take place as Barth begins to talk of, and engage in, renewed theological activity. In early June 1916 Barth spent a short break with Thurneysen during which they decided to undertake new theological studies.[84] On the 26th of June Barth wrote to Thurneysen that he had started making extracts from Kant; but by the 19th of July he had already begun to work on Paul's letter to the Romans.[85] The chief product of this new activity was, of course, the first commentary on Romans, published at the end of 1918. The nature of the development that was taking place became visible somewhat earlier than this, however. Significant here is Barth's lecture "Die neue Welt in der Bibel" delivered in Leutwil on 6th February 1917, in which new patterns of thought are clearly crystallising.[86] It is worth considering this lecture for a moment as it illustrates well how Barth's views have changed.

The key idea of the lecture is, as the title suggests, that what is significant in the bible is not the history or the morality or even the religion within it, but

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[83] See Busch *Karl Barth*, op. cit. 88. A stimulus to an increasingly eschatological understanding of the problem of the relation of absoluteness and relativity was undoubtedly Barth's meeting with Christoph Blumhardt in April in 1915. See Busch, *Karl Barth*, 84-5 for a brief account of this. It should be noted though that even before the meeting with Blumhardt Barth's thinking was placing increasing stress on eschatology. See Barth's comment in the letter to Thurneysen of 5th February 1915 , mentioned above, that he "set such emphasis Sunday by Sunday on the last things". (*B-Th. Br. I.* 30.)

[84] See *RTM*, 37. See also Thurneysen's footnote to Barth's letter to him of 26th June 1916 in *B-Th. Br. I.*, 145, note 1.

[85] *B-Th. Br. I.*, 146. Barth did not at this point have any clear idea of writing a book for publication. His comments suggest that his decision to work on Romans was his own (and somewhat unforeseen), rather than any plan discussed in advance with Thurneysen. Note also a mistranslation by Smart of Barth's reference to Kant. He has Barth saying: "I am already busy making extracts from Kant (until now prolegomena and laying of foundations, next it is to be the *Critique of Pure Reason*, oh!)".Barth was actually saying that he had so far dealt with Kant's "Prolegomena" and "Grundlegung". Smart apparently misses the fact that these are abbreviated titles of two of Kant's works. See *RTM*, 37-8.

[86] In *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich, 1925), 18-32. ET: 'The Strange New World Within The Bible' in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* trans. D. Horton, (Hodder, London, 1928), 28-50. Thurneysen has pointed out that the dating of this to Autumn 1916 in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (reproduced also in *WGWM*) is erroneous. See *B-Th. Br. I.*, 170, note 1.

a new world. If we go to the bible looking for history or morality or religion we will find them, certainly; but if we seek answers to questions about these things we "find ourselves only in the midst of a vast human controversy and far, far away from reality, or what might become reality in our lives".[87] The bible does not answer our religious questions - it has another centre, another concern altogether: "All religions may be found in the Bible, if one will have it so; but when he looks closely, there are none at all. There is only — the 'other', new, greater world!"[88] This 'other' world, the world of God, is not however something that can be appropriated or taken possession of. It is not the answer to any of our questions:

> One cannot learn or imitate this life of the divine seed in the new world. One can only let it live, grow, and ripen within him. One can only believe — can only hold the ground whither he has been led. Or not believe. There is no third way.[89]

It is not difficult to see how Barth's thought here has developed from his earlier Herrmannian theology. The basic problem is again the dualism between the relativity of historical reality and the absoluteness of divine reality. And the essential shape of Barth's liberal theology remains. As before, there is no demonstrable revelation. However there is now no individualistic religious experience either, to serve as the point of access to divine reality. It has dropped out of the picture. In its place there is the notion of the 'other' world of God. Knowledge of God, as before, is not achievable except as granted by God; only now it is not religious experience that is "the reflection of a fact that has been created and projected into us".[90] Instead it is the Bible that speaks of this new world. In the place of religious individualism appears eschatology. There are elements in this both of the idea of the imperfection and provisionality of the world, which had been so important in Barth's socialism, and of the idea of the relativity of the historical and phenomenal world, which had been so important in Barth's

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[87] Barth, *WGWM*, 43.
[88] Ibid. 42.
[89] Ibid. 41.
[90] Barth, *GPG*, 89.

liberalism.[91] "The fact is", Barth says, "that we must seek our answer in this direction — 'Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.' "[92]

There is in this lecture also a re-emphasis of an idea in Barth's early theology which was to become increasingly important for his thought: the idea that the antithesis between the relative and the absolute can only be overcome by God's act, God's "deed of election".[93] This early idea is reflected in a passage which points forward to a theology of the Word of God:

> It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once and for all in Jesus Christ. It is this which is within the Bible. The word of God is within the Bible.[94]

vi. The two commentaries on *Romans*

The new theology which began to emerge in this lecture was affirmed and expanded in the commentary on Romans which was published almost two years later. Notable particularly in the commentary is the development of the 'organological conceptuality' which had already appeared at Leutwil, and for which Barth was heavily indebted to J.T. Beck. The notion of the Kingdom of God growing within this world in fact becomes the key to the commentary's eschatology. This conceptuality doesn't mean, though, that the world of God grows *out of* this world. There is a sharp *diastasis* between this world and the world of God, a continuation in a new form of the gulf between the relativity of this world and divine absoluteness. Moreover,

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[91] An important comment of Barth's which is of some relevance to this relation between his historical relativism and his eschatological relativisation of the world is contained in his letter to Thurneysen of 1st January 1916. He says "Already under the influence of Herrmann, I always thought of historical criticism as merely a means of attaining freedom in relation to the tradition, not, however, as a constituting factor in a new liberal tradition as apparently Wernle and his like want to have it. Already five years ago I collided with Wernle on this point. And the antithesis will, in fact, become still sharper." See *B-Th. Br. I.*, 121. ET in *RTM*, 36.

[92] Barth, *WGWM*, 42.

[93] Barth, *CGG*, 53.

[94] Barth, *WGWM*, 43.

Barth, having rejected the resolution of this *diastasis* in religious experience, is at pains to emphasize that it is not within our power to bridge the gulf, and we should not imagine that any of our activities in this world can do so. One of the most important sections of the commentary, therefore, is the discussion of Romans chapter 13. Barth no longer seeks a practical politics connected with the realization of the Kingdom of God. On the contrary he sees great value in the unresolved tension between the new world of God and this world, and counsels against actions which would draw attention away from it. Barth describes this in an important passage, discussing Romans 13, v. 4:

> It is a matter of the great work of constructing a new world, which can manifest itself in storms and catastrophes, but which must be achieved inwardly and essentially through a quiet, common becoming-accustomed of all humankind to the divine atmosphere, through a common becoming-comfortable in the divine orders, and which may not be absorbed and disturbed by individual, anarchistic explosions into the external. ... Each one is therefore supported by the divine, which wants to hold them back from personal revolt against the ruling powers in themselves ... lest they diminish the tension of the general situation through hasty openings of all kind of valves; lest they destroy the fruitfulness of the moment through rash 'letting out' and going on about God's mystery; lest they compromise the blessing of the future by the grinding down of seed; but so that the healing unrest, which has been placed in their heart by God, might deepen itself and grow stronger, and reinforce the flood-tide of the divine which is rising all around, and which will one day by itself tear apart the dams.[95]

Barth's eschatology is such that he opposes any tendency to try to construct the new world by revolt against existing powers. But this is not because the existing powers are good. They are of this world. But equally any kingdom

[95] *Der Römerbrief (Erste Fassung) 1919* (Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1985), 508. The passage is a useful illustration of some of the language and conceptuality of the commentary. The talk of "the divine" is characteristic, as is the talk of the "seed" of future blessings. Both are products of Barth's organic conception of the kingdom of God, which, while it is other than our world, and is brought about not by our action but by God's, nevertheless grows in the midst of this world. Steven G. Smith goes so far as to describe J.T. Beck's idea of the Holy Spirit's work as a new 'organism' as "the hermeneutical centrepiece of the first edition of Barth's *Romans*". (Smith op. cit. 21.) The passage also gives a good sense of the "dynamic eschatology" which von Balthasar regarded as the theme of both this book *and* the subsequent second edition. He describes this as "the irreversible movement from a fatally doomed temporal order to a new living order filled with the life of God". See von Balthasar op. cit. 64. Busch, *Karl Barth*, p. 100, describes the same thing rather differently, in suggesting that the book had two principal points to make: one, the relativity of all human distinctions and possibilities, even religious possibilities; and two, the distinction of the new kingdom of God from all such human possibilities. Busch's description makes clear the continuity of the book with the course of Barth's development as already described above.

we construct by our own power will be of this world, and will not be the kingdom of God. This is not to advocate quietism, though. We live in the world and cannot avoid our responsibility for it. The state is necessary, and we have responsibilities as citizens which we ought not to deny. But no programme or policy of whatever kind can claim the slightest justification from the new world that is God's alone to bring. Barth's eschatology is emphatically not about hope for this world as such. It is hope for the new world of God which is distinguished radically from our world. Even if the new world is to grow in the midst of this world 'organically', this world as such is already finished with. The divine flood-tide will tear it to pieces (*zerreißen*). It is clear here that the absolute demand of God's Kingdom and the relative ethical and political programmes of this world are further apart than ever before in Barth's thought. Before long, however, they were to become further apart still.

In the second edition of his *Romans*, Barth replaced his organological conceptuality with the idea of the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and the world. The key concept of the book is an idea which had played almost no explicit part in the earlier version: the *Krisis* of divine judgement, under which the whole of this world stands.[96] Much closer to the surface of the work, then, is the problem of how it is that God can make himself known in revelation without thereby becoming a given object, able to be apprehended by human cognition and described by human concepts.[97] Even if God should choose to reveal himself, that revelation will still be as incommunicable as the individual experience of God which had been at the centre of Barth's earliest theology. Our concepts and language are inadequate for it.

This is the 'logic' of both editions of Barth's *Romans*, though it is much more consistently visible in the second. If our religion and morality are part of the old world, not the new; if our religious and theological speech is subject to the relativity and inadequacy that afflict everything in the old world, how

[96] It is worth noting that *Krisis* is not only one form of the German word for crisis, but the transiliteration of a Greek term meaning a decision or judgement.

[97] Bruce McCormack identifies this as the fundamental problem of the second *Romans*, describing it as the problem of the divine Subjectivity in revelation. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 207-8.

can the theologian speak? Isn't the attempt to speak theologically necessarily to try to grasp the new world by means of possibilities inherent in the old? How can theology speak about that which is not part of this world? How can the theologian speak about the new world of God? How, even, can the theologian speak of the dissolution of the old world, in the rising flood of the divine? All such speech is surely historical, relative, done away with, finished in principle. It is surely a product of "the criminal arrogance of religion".[98] As Barth says in the first *Romans*: "In the face of the logic of the divine order, (Rom. 1:32) one can take refuge in no religious-moral 'standpoint'. The standpoint itself condemns that which stands on it."[99]

The paradox becomes particularly clear if we consider the notion of the universal *Krisis*, so important in the second *Romans*. All of human history, Barth says there, stands under a *Krisis* of divine judgement.[100] How, though, could we know and express this? By revelation, Barth says. The *Krisis* is contained in the divine address. But revelation cannot be the passing on of communicable truths about the world or about God.[101] If it were, then the *Krisis* would not be universal. These truths at least would not be subject to it. And if revelation is not the passing on of communicable truths, then any claim that knowledge of or speech about a universal *Krisis* is founded on revelation will not save such speech from being subject to that *Krisis*.[102] To talk of the whole of human history, culture and speech being under a universal *Krisis* of judgement therefore seems to be self-refuting. The

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[98] *Romans II*, 37.

[99] *Romans I*, 43.

[100] For example "There is no fragment or epoch of history which can be pronounced divine. The whole history of the Church and of all religion takes place in this world. What is called the 'history of our salvation' is not an event in the midst of other events, but is nothing less than the KRISIS of all events." *Romans II*, 57. Also "The true God, Himself removed from all concretion, is the Origin of the KRISIS of every concrete thing, the Judge, the negation of this world in which is included also the god of human logic." *Romans II*, 82.

[101] As Barth said in the first *Romans*: "The revelation which has taken place in Christ is not the communication of an intellectual clarity, a formula about the world, the possession of which enables one to be at rest". *Romans I*, 356. Also, in the second *Romans* "Faith is not revealed to us by *flesh and blood*, ... no one can communicate it to himself or to anyone else. What I heard yesterday I must hear again to-day; and if I am to hear it afresh tomorrow, it must be revealed by the Father of Jesus, who is in heaven, and by Him only." *Romans II*, 98.

[102] "We must not conclude from this that we have achieved a secure standing place. We have done no more than make room for the 'Moment' which has no before and no after, and for the decision which lies only in God's hands. We cannot claim that we have attained this possibility." *Romans II*, 137.

theologian's attempt to speak - about God, yet in the world - seems to be self-refuting.

All of this, of course, was already a problem for as consistent a follower of Herrmann as Barth had been in 1909. The redeeming feature of that early theology, though, had been its confidence in the possession of God in religious experience. Theological speech could at least be accounted for as conceptualization of that experience, inadequate perhaps, but nonetheless a parabolic witness to that experience. Now it is not at all clear what account can be given of the relation between absolute divine truth and our concepts. In the second *Romans* in particular the dialectical method adopted suggests that the only thing our speaking can in fact witness to is its own inadequacy. Without a ground in religious experience the position of the modern theologian is both perplexing and uncomfortable.

vii. Theologian and preacher: a cry for rescue.

It is hardly surprising then that Barth, when asked in 1922 to give a lecture imparting an introductory understanding of his theology, rebelled against the very notion that he 'had' something that could be called 'his theology'. He said:

> I must frankly confess to you that what I might conceivably call 'my theology' becomes, when I look at it closely, a single point, and that not, as one might demand as the least qualification of a true theology, a *stand*point, but rather a *mathematical* point upon which one cannot stand — a *view*point merely.

He suggested a few lines later that he did not offer a new theology, in a manner to rival other theologies but simply:

> a kind of *marginal note*, a gloss which in its way agrees and yet does not agree with all these types — and which, I am convinced, loses its meaning the moment it becomes more than a note and takes up space as a new theology next to the others.[103]

[103] Barth, *WGWM*, 98. The comments are from a lecture delivered to a Ministers' meeting in Schulpforte in July 1922 entitled "Not und Verheißung der christlichen Verkündigung". See *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, 99-124. ET: "The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching" in *WGWM*, 97-135.

The theologian's task is problematic to the core; there is no stable point on which the theologian can stand and speak. Interestingly, Barth adds that his attempt to speak in such a way, as a marginal note, a *theologia viatorum*, arose from what he felt to be "the need and promise of Christian preaching".[104] He continues the lecture by discussing some of the difficulties he experienced as preacher in Safenwil. He says: "two magnitudes, life and the Bible, have risen before me (and still rise!) like Scylla and Charybdis: if these are the whence and whither of Christian preaching, who shall, who can, be a minister and preach?" His audience that day was a meeting of ministers. He tells them that he is sure they already know and understand this problem, and that those who do "are already introduced to my theology".[105] Barth's theology, on this his own account, is essentially an acknowledgment and restatement of the problematic position of one who would speak of God, whether theologian or preacher: "the familiar situation of the minister on Saturday at his desk and on Sunday in his pulpit crystallized in my case into a marginal note to all theology".[106]

The continuation of these remarks is no less interesting. Having emphasized the determination of his thought by the unbridgeable gap between the "whence and whither of Christian preaching", he makes it clear that his theology does not consist in the discovery of a way out of this problematic, critical situation.

> *Exactly not that*. But this critical situation itself became to me an explanation of the character of all theology. What else can theology be but the truest possible expression of this quest and questioning on the part of the minister, the description of this embarrassment into which a man falls when he ventures upon this task and out of which he cannot find his way — a cry for rescue arising from great need and great hope?[107]

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104 Barth, *WGWM*, 100.

105 Ibid. 101.

106 Ibid. 101. It is interesting to recall that Barth's 1909 article "Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit" began with the thought that the transition from theological study to the parish was particularly difficult for the pupil of modern theology - and counselled that this difficulty must be faced, rather than avoided in a flight into practical work.

107 ibid. 101. There are, not surprisingly, many passages in the second *Romans* which deal with these and similar themes. For example "The man of God is aware of the true and tragic and paradoxical state of affairs. He knows what he is about when he adopts a point of view which is no point of view, and when he in nowise regards himself as excused by his vocation." *Romans II*, 58.

The problem with the theology Barth found around him, he says, was that it did not recognize the seriousness of this situation. Why, he asks,

> did the theologians I knew seek to represent the minister's perplexity ... as a condition superable and sufferable, instead of *understanding* it at all costs, instead of facing it — and thereby perhaps discovering in it, in its very insuperableness and insufferableness, the real theme of theology?[108]

The insufferableness of the minister's perplexity as the real theme of theology! This is a striking way of speaking, to say the least. Barth continues with it later in the lecture:

> as a matter of fact, the church is really an impossibility. There can be no such thing as a minister. Who dares, who can, preach, knowing what preaching is? The situation of crisis in the church has not yet been impressed upon us with sufficient intensity. One wonders if it ever will be.[109]

Barth goes on to relate the impossibility of ministry specifically to the Reformation focus on the Word of God. In contrast, there is in Roman Catholicism a "way of God to man and of man to God" which is "evident, obvious, well-ordered, and possible".[110] It is significant, though, that when Barth glances towards Roman Catholicism he does not simply register disagreement or disapproval. He looks at it with a kind of envious admiration, as someone might look at an object of forbidden desire or unattainable beauty. He says:

> At those times when the task of being *verbi divini ministri* ... has worried and oppressed us, have we not all felt a yearning for the fine worship of Catholicism, and for the enviable rôle of the priest at the altar? ... I once heard it announced literally at a first mass, "*Le prêtre un autre Jésus Christ!*" If only we might be such too![111]

There is a strong sense that Barth has felt, and still feels, the the sheer insufferableness of the theologian's and preacher's situation. He longs for its problematic character to be resolved, for something of the positive role that

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[108] Barth, *WGWM*, 102.
[109] Ibid. 126.
[110] Ibid. 113.
[111] Ibid. 113.

the Catholic priest has in the mass, when "the double grace of the sacrificial death and the incarnation of the Son of God is not only preached in words but consummated under his hands, and he becomes a *creator Creatoris* before the people".[112]

Certainly it is not this solution that Barth aims at; in his view it is a premature dissolution of the problem, rather than a genuine solution. He does not want the qualitative distinction between time and eternity to be forgotten so quickly; he does not want the illusion perpetuated, as he sees it, that God's address to humanity can become our secure possession. But from 1909 onwards Barth's theological work has been a quest for a way of coming to terms with the gap between human speech about God and the object of that speech; it is a quest for a way of speaking which fully recognizes that gap yet is not silenced by it. To put it another way, it is a quest for a point from which the preacher and the theologian can speak of God, and speak truly, while still speaking in human words, and therefore as part of the human community. It is a protest against the too hasty integration of our speaking about God into the life of the community - in which event it cannot possibly be speaking of its intended object; and at the same time it is a cry of longing for the impossible possibility of a true speaking about God in human language, within the human community.

viii. The beginnings of a solution.

A few months later, in a lecture delivered in October 1922, Barth once again spoke of the perplexity that results from the minister's situation:

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112 Barth, *WGWM*, 113. It would not be surprising if Barth's statements about the paradoxical and problematic character of preaching and of theological speech were found to reflect, to some extent, his own experience as minister and as professor of theology. The strongest indication that this is in fact the case is the exchange of letters between Barth and Thurneysen in June 1925 when the possibility emerged of Barth succeeding Hermann Kutter in his ministry in Neumünster in Zürich. In a letter of 13th June, Barth talked of how troubled he was by the memory of how greatly he had failed as a pastor in Safenwil, unlike, he adds, Thurneysen in Leutwil. See *B-Th. Br. II.*, 341 (ET: *RTM*, 230). This, in a private letter to his close friend, should not be dismissed too quickly as false modesty. In a letter of 23rd June, Barth says he is very conscious that he can be "*neither* a proper professor *nor* a proper pastor". See *B-Th. Br. II.*, 343 (ET: *RTM*, 231). It is perhaps not too fanciful to connect Barth's comments to his continuing struggle with this central problem: the incapacity of the preacher or the theologian to do the very thing they exist in order to do - speak of God.

> We whose profession it is to teach the inner meanings of religion find ourselves in perplexity. We may be hopeful but we cannot be happy. We darkly suspected when we were yet students that it would be so; we have grown older and it is worse than we suspected. Whether we are ministers in parishes or in professorial chairs, it is always the same perplexity: none of us can avoid it.[113]

The perplexity arises from the situation of the minister, which Barth gives a definitive and famous description of: "As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both our obligation and our inability and by that very recognition give God the glory."[114] This situation is what defines the ministry as a profession - and it is what alienates it as a profession. If ministers try to avoid this paradox by offering a more worldly wisdom, the results are unedifying: "We cut a ridiculous figure as village sages — or city sages. As such we are socially superfluous."[115] This lecture signifies the beginning of the end of the phase of the second *Romans*. The insufferable nature of this logic and this situation is now almost tangible. The sign that Barth is seeking a way beyond the dialectical method of his commentary comes in his consideration of the three possible ways of doing theology in its perplexity: dogmatic, negativistic, and dialectical. He begins his discussion of the last of these by proclaiming that "intrinsically it is by far the best". Its balancing of affirmation by negation mean that attention is focussed beyond the claims and counter-claims themselves towards the living centre which cannot itself be apprehended. But in the course of the discussion Barth recognizes that dialectical method itself cannot ensure that the truth is witnessed to. He says that when when the practitioner of dialectic succeeds, it is not because of the dialectic itself but because "through his ambiguous and unambiguous assertions, the living Truth in the centre, the reality of God, asserted *itself*". However, says Barth:

> this possibility, the possibility that God *himself* speaks when he is spoken of, is not part of the dialectic way as such; it arises rather at the point where this way comes to an end. It is evident that one is under no compulsion to listen to the assertions of the dialectician. In this respect the dialectician is no

[113] In a lecture entitled "Das Wort Gottes als Aufgabe der Theologie" delivered on 3rd October at a conference of the Friends of the *Christlichen Welt*, on the Elgersburg. Translated as 'The Word of God and the Task of the Ministry', in *WGWM*, 183 - 217.

[114] Ibid. 186.

[115] Ibid. 189.

better than the dogmatician and the self-critic.[116]

Dialectical method has no power to enable the theologian to do what is otherwise impossible - speak of God. But if this is so, the perplexity of the minister really is inescapable. If dialectical method offers no escape from the logic of the universal *Krisis* of judgement, Barth must admit that this mode of theology, which was gaining him so much admiration and attention, has no more merit than other modes. But dialectic has peculiar disadvantages: it is "an appalling performance for those who are not free from dizziness".[117] When Barth says that the absence of the living truth from the dialectician's speech is, "only the more painfully evident"[118] he was not, perhaps, using excessive hyperbole. The balancing of affirmation by negation has the disadvantage of constantly appearing to undermine the speaker's own purpose. If such dialectic cannot itself point to the truth beyond it, the only thing left may be the speaker's constant undermining of their own role. This insufferable situation and perplexity of the minister and theologian now sends Barth in search of a mode of discourse which will not betray his convictions about the *diastasis* between the relativity of history and the absoluteness of God, but which, unlike dialectical method, can envisage its own existence, and the lives of those who engage in it, as consisting in something other than continual frustration. At this stage Barth has not found such a mode of speech. But he does give two hints as to the direction in which he must go. The first lies in the criticism he makes of dialectic method. What really matters is not the dialectic, but "the possibility that God *himself* speaks when he is spoken of". He expands on this in his penultimate paragraph:

> It may be that the Word, the word of God, which we ourselves shall never speak, has put on our weakness and unprofitableness so that our word in its very weakness and unprofitableness has become capable of being the mortal frame, the earthen vessel, of the word of God. It may be so, I say: and if it were, we should have reason not so much to speak of our need as to declare and publish the hope and hidden glory of our calling.[119]

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116 Barth, *WGWM*, 211.
117 Ibid. 207.
118 Ibid. 211.
119 Ibid. 216.

This is, once again, an appearance of the thought that was later to become the *analogia fidei*. What Barth seeks is a mode of discourse which will allow this analogical possibility to flourish. The second hint is his mention of Christology at the conclusion of the lecture. All of Barth's thoughts, he says, have been circling round "the one point which in the New Testament is called Jesus Christ." He immediately adds: "Whoever can say 'Jesus Christ' need not say 'It *may* be'; he can say 'It *is*.' "[120] The implication of this is that Christology is the key to a speaking of God on the basis of God's gracious decision. Anyone who can speak of Jesus Christ will be speaking on the basis that God has spoken. The only problem is how we speak of Jesus Christ! With this hope and this doubt, Barth concludes the lecture with these famous words: "Can theology, should theology, pass beyond *prolegomena* to Christology? It may be that everything is said in the prolegomena."[121] As early as October 1922, then, Barth affirmed that a dogmatic speaking is at no disadvantage compared to a dialectical speaking; moreover he had begun to take seriously the possibility that God's gracious decision in Jesus Christ can be the basis of this, and therefore the possibility of a dogmatics grounded in Christology. The thought has clearly occurred to him that on the basis of God's Word 'putting on our weakness' it is possible to do more than express the insufficiency of the speech of the preacher or theologian; it is possible

120 Barth, *WGWM*, 216.

121 Ibid. 217. It seems to me quite clear that Barth did not believe here that everything was said in the prolegomena. He was genuinely seeking a way forward and Christology seemed to be the key. See though Bruce McCormack's plea in mitigation of those like Hans Frei who took the opposite view but without access to those works of Barth which remained unpublished during his lifetime. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 313, n. 70. McCormack's discussion of this lecture offers several reasons in support of the view that the closing question is not rhetorical. I would add to them the evidence of the letter Barth wrote to Thurneysen on 7th October 1922, shortly after the delivery of this lecture. Describing the debate after the lecture, Barth says: "Good, in fact remarkably good, was E. Foerster, who flatly revoked his criticism of last year and only underlined from his side the Christological problem which came up at the close of my lecture (which is not to be taken amiss in the light of how little we are able to say about it at present)." See *B-Th. Br. II.*, 104-5 (ET: *RTM*, 109).

also to declare "the hope and hidden glory of our calling."[122]

There is a quite striking development in the course of this lecture, then, in Barth's dual realizations of the incapacity of dialectical speech to point beyond itself in the desired way, and of the potential for dogmatic speech on the basis of "the possibility that God *himself* speaks when he is spoken of".[123] Such ideas take Barth well beyond the dialectical method embodied in the structure of the lecture, in terms of which the minister's recognition of his conflicting obligation and inability will give God the glory. For it is clear now that such a recognition of obligation and inability cannot by itself give God the glory. The critical step away from dialectical to dogmatic form has occurred in the course of this lecture. The idea of "God's deed of election"

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[122] I would note at this point that although Bruce McCormack describes this lecture at some length (see McCormack, *CRDT*, 307-314) he nowhere acknowledges that there is any new development in it, let alone that it might constitute a critique of the theology of the second *Romans*, or that it might constitute Barth's first tentative step towards a permanent resolution of the problem that has dominated his theology since 1909. There seems to me to be a strong case for saying that there is indeed a significant critique here of the dialectical speaking which had been the dominant form in the second *Romans*. The relevant passage is worth quoting at length: "The real weakness of the dogmatician and the self-critic, their inability really to speak of *God*, the necessity which is upon them always to speak of something else, appears to be raised even to a higher power in the dialectician. For the very reason that he refers *everything* to the living truth itself, the inevitable *absence* of that living truth from his own references must be only the more painfully evident. And even if his own references were accompanied by that which gives all things their truth and meaning, even if God himself should say through him the one true word, his own word, *by that very fact* the dialectician himself would be proved wrong and could only confess that he could not speak of God. ... There is no reason why the dialectic theology should be *specially* capable of leading one up *to* a gate which can be opened only from within. If one should fancy that it possesses a special pre-eminence, at least in preparing the way for the action of God, let him remember that it and its paradoxes can do no more *to this end* than can a simple direct word of faith and humility." (*WGWM*, 211-12). This is surely a striking recognition by Barth that it is a mistake to think that dialectical method can point one beyond its theses and antitheses to the truth that is God's. It has no power whatsoever to do this. The dialectic that remains present in this lecture itself, in its recognition of the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of speaking of God, has a restless quality. Barth is no longer happy to leave it at that. He seeks a way forward, from the prolegomena to Christology. There is a despairing note in his comments: "The task of the minister is the word of God. This spells the certain defeat of the ministry. It is the *frustration* of *every* ministry and *every* minister. ... our purpose is that God should speak; and we need not be surprised, therefore, if at the end of our way, however well we should have done our work – nay, for the very reason that we have done it well – the Word should still remain *unspoken*." (ibid. 214 - 5.) Barth's restlessness with regard to dialectical method was actually intimated in advance of the lecture, in a letter to Thurneysen of 20th September: "Something in me urges me to strike out beyond the mere dialectic to the Word which 'resounds from heaven' (Luther) but what it is with this Word and how one comes to say something about it, I haven't the faintest idea." See *B-Th. Br. II.* 99.

[123] Barth, *WGWM*, 211.

which has been present in Barth's thought from the beginning has finally begun to yield fruit. Barth had been seeking a mode of speech for preacher and theologian which would overcome the problem of the relation of absoluteness and relativity. He had been seeking a discourse which could be both true speech about God, yet at the same time be fully human, integrated into the speech of the community. Only such a discourse could turn insufferable perplexity into healing unrest. And at last, in October 1922, Barth has begun to perceive its character.

i. New movements in culture: German Expressionism 1910 - 14.

The term 'Expressionism' seems to have originated at the very beginning of this century, as a name for new developments in French painting, marking a distinction between this newer art and Impressionism. Wolf-Dieter Dube, for example, notes its use by the Frenchman Julien-Auguste Hervé in 1901 as a designation of his own work; and that it was used around the same time by the critic Louis Vauxcelles as a description of the painting of Henri Matisse.[1] A decade or so later it began to be applied to new movements among German painters whose work displayed a similar turn against Impressionism and other established styles: the first such use noted by Dube dates from 1912.[2] Very soon it had become a term which applied primarily to German art, marking it out from post-Impressionist movements in France and elsewhere, notably Fauvism and Cubism. Dube notes the use of the term by Paul Fechter in 1914 in precisely this sense.[3] At the same time it began to be used of contemporary developments in other areas of German culture - notably poetry and drama, but gradually encompassing almost every area of cultural activity from architecture to film.

This brief history of the term illustrates two important points about German Expressionism. First, the term came to be applied to a group of related movements in German culture which, while they were distinctively German, were at the same time related to artistic movements elsewhere in Europe. Expressionism was, broadly speaking, the German manifestation of the phenomenon we now think of as international modernism.[4] Secondly,

1 See Wolf-Dieter Dube *The Expressionists* trans. M. Whittall, (Thames & Hudson Ltd., London, 1972), 18.

2 Dube says (p. 19) that the exhibition in Bonn in 1913 with the title 'Rheinische Expressionisten' was "the first time that an exhibition of German artists had appeared with the heading 'Expressionists' ". However he himself notes (p. 105) that the *Sturm* exhibition in Berlin in March 1912 (which was in fact the first of the *Sturm* exhibitions) carried the title 'Deutsche Expressionisten'.

3 Ibid. 19. Dube comments "What Fechter succeeded in doing was to prescribe limits which are still valid on the whole, but within them the terminology remained undefined."

4 "On the one hand, it is part of the great international movement of modernism in art and literature; on the other hand, it is a turbulent and vital chapter in the catastrophic history of modern Germany." Walter H. Sokel *The Writer in Extremis - Expressionism in Twentieth-Century German Literature* (Stanford University Press, California, 1959), 3.

the above history indicates that 'Expressionism' was not the name given by artists themselves to any programme they pursued; it was applied retrospectively, first by critics and then by artists and writers themselves. Since there was no definitive Expressionist programme, there is no single criterion which defines the essence of Expressionism or which could enable us to circumscribe its boundaries neatly. Its characteristic forms and concerns are best understood by considering the history of the diverse movements that made up Expressionism, from its birth around 1910 to its demise in the early 1920s.

It is worth noting at this point that, contrary to what might be expected, the *distinctive* character of Expressionism is not its emphasis on expression as the proper method and aim of art. It is certainly true that Expressionism was very much concerned with the expression of inner realities; the artist's works were indeed understood as vehicles for the expression of emotion or of inner realities which could not otherwise be conveyed. But this concern was not unique to German Expressionism. In this most general sense 'Expressionism' would be an apt description of most of the European modernist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. From the painting of Van Gogh and Matisse to the music of Schoenberg, an emphasis on expression was one of the most common aims of modern art in general.[5]

A useful starting point for understanding the relevant history is indicated by Walter Sokel, in his perceptive study of Expressionist writing *The Writer in Extremis*. He describes Expressionism as:

> a peculiarly German phenomenon, which contains elements, notably the violent conflict between the generations, not to be found to the same extent in the experimental literature of other countries. The history of German

[5] See Christopher Butler's *Early Modernism* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994), 35-6. He quotes Van Gogh's description of his aim in his *The Night Café* (1888) as the attempt "to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green". He also quotes Matisse's *Notes of a Painter* (1908): "The entire arrangement of my picture is expressive: the place occupied by the figures, the empty spaces around them, the proportions, everything has its share. Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the diverse elements at the painter's command to express his feelings." Also see p. 53, where Schoenberg's music is said to be "about the purest form of Expressionism". This understanding of art as expressive is at the same time a move away from the understanding of art as representation. Impressionism had not broken with representation - only with a particular view of what was being represented and how it should be done.

> literature since the 1770's has been marked by revolts of youthful poets and writers which aim not only at a new style in writing but at a new way of life as well. Expressionism is the last and most intense of these revolts.[6]

Sokel's emphasis on the character of Expressionism as a revolt not just against established art but against the established order is important. This anti-bourgeois orientation, articulated as a sense of the dissolution and collapse of the old social order, was one of the most universal features of Expressionist activity. It was paradigmatically stated in a short poem published in Berlin in January 1911, written by Jakob van Hoddis, and entitled *Weltende*:

> Dem Bürger fliegt vom spitzen Kopf der Hut,
> In allen Lüften hallt es wie Geschrei.
> Dachdecker stürzen ab und gehn entzwei,
> Und an den Küsten—liest man—steigt die Flut.
>
> Der Sturm ist da, die wilden Meere hupfen
> An Land, um dicke Dämme zu zerdrücken.
> Die meisten Menschen haben einen Schnupfen.
> Die Eisenbahnen fallen von den Brücken.
>
> (The bourgeois's hat flies off his pointed head,
> the air re-echoes with a cry.
> Roofers plunge and hit the ground,
> And at the coast—one reads—seas are rising.
>
> The storm is here, the savage seas hop
> On land and crash thick dams.
> Most people have a cold.
> Trains fall off bridges.)[7]

Van Hoddis's poem had an extraordinary impact, such that it has been described as the "Marseillaise of the Expressionist Revolution", and has been identified as the real beginning of German Expressionism.[8] It was chosen to be the first item in what was probably the definitive anthology of Expressionist poetry, *Menschheitsdämmerung*, published at the height of

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[6] Sokel, *WE*, 2.

[7] First published in the journal *Der Demokrat* Berlin, 11 January 1911. The translation is from Paul Raabe (ed.) *The Era of German Expressionism* trans. J.M. Ritchie, (Calder and Boyars Ltd., London, 1974), 44-5.

[8] Ibid. 313.

Expressionism's popular success in 1920.[9] Its imagery articulates a sense of the crisis of bourgeois culture and society, and suggests its impending collapse. It suggests the dissolution of order into chaos, in which the most trivial events stand alongside the most momentous, there being no viewpoint from which they can be distinguished. The success of this poem lay in its concise statement of convictions and apprehensions that were widespread. Testimony to this can be found not only in the poetry of the period but in the later reflections of those who lived through it. Claire Jung, for example, said this:

> The creative work in which the expression of this age has been captured already shows the dissolution of form. In all of them the disintegration of the old social ties, the collapse of an all-embracing and till then generally accepted faith is already visible, but also the quest for a new one.

Expressionism, she affirms, did not just aim at a transformation of artistic form. It sought "to evoke a revolution in the general attitude to life".[10]

Along with this sense of the inadequacy and imminent collapse of the old order, many Expressionist writers and artists attempted to offer a vision of something new and better. There was among them a widespread conviction that they were on the brink of, and were creating, something decisively new. Again testimony can be found in their later reflections: take for example Kurt Pinthus, editor of *Menschheitsdämmerung*, who spoke of hundreds of young people being "seized by the awareness and the certainty of what was coming, namely a new generation".[11] Or take the writer Johannes Becher:

> We felt like new beings, like creatures on the first day of creation, a new world was to be ushered in with us, and we swore we would cause such an uproar that the bourgeois world would be struck deaf and dumb and consider it a blessing to be sent straight to Hades by us.[12]

Pinthus' anthology, mentioned above, illustrates something of the range of

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[9] *Menschheitsdämmerung: Eine Symphonie jüngster Dichtung* ed. Kurt Pinthus, (E. Rowohlt, Berlin,1920). Note for example the comments of Ronald Taylor: "There is still no more authentic or powerful source of this poetry than the anthology published in Berlin in 1920 under the title *Menschheitsdämmerung*". See Taylor op. cit. 80.

[10] Raabe, *EGE*, 38-9.

[11] Ibid. 67-8.

[12] Ibid. 44.

attitudes that could thrive between these poles of apocalyptic collapse and utopian enthusiasm. Even the titles suffice to show the range: it extends from Ehrenstein's 'Leid' and 'Schmerz' through to the same author's 'Hoffnung', from van Hoddis' 'Weltende' to Werfel's 'Veni creator spiritus'. Indeed even the title of the anthology hints at this ambivalence, since *Dämmerung* can mean either twilight or dawn. Whether the Expressionist poets stated their opposition to the bourgeois world in the form of a proclamation of its downfall, or the announcement of a new order and a 'new man', their style was distinctive: "direct, peremptory, insistent, challenging".[13]

As Sokel indicated, moreover, Expressionism was a revolt of young artists and writers against an older generation. This self-consciousness was evident in the titles of poems and anthologies, such as Ernst Wilhelm Lotz' *Aufbruch der Jugend*.[14] It was also evident among painters, for example in the programme set out in 1906 by the Dresden based group of artists known as "Die Brücke":

> Believing in development and in a new generation both of those who create and of those who enjoy, we call all young people together, and as young people who carry the future in us we want to wrest freedom for our gestures and for our lives from the older, comfortably established forces. We claim as our own everyone who reproduces directly and without falsification whatever it is that drives him to create.[15]

The Expressionists were indeed mostly younger artists born in the mid 1880's or even later.[16] Their energy and outlook were essentially youthful: it

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[13] Taylor, op. cit. 85.

[14] See R. Samuel and R.H. Thomas *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre 1910-1924* (W. Heffer, Cambridge, 1939), 2.

[15] Quoted by Dube, op. cit. 21. This group, formed in 1905, was one of the *loci* in which German Expressionist painting emerged, along with the Munich Neue Künstlervereinigung, formed in 1909, and the Berlin Neue Sezession, founded in 1910.

[16] See Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 3. Examples include Georg Heym - born 1887; Walter Hasenclever - 1890; Kurt Hiller - 1885; Kasimir Edschmid - 1890; Gustav Sack - 1885; Oskar Kokoschka - 1886; Paul Kornfeld - 1889; Reinhard Sorge - 1892; Ernst Toller - 1893; Fritz von Unruh - 1885; Franz Werfel - 1890; and, not least, Franz Kafka - 1883. Among painters, the four founder members of the Brücke group, Kirchner, Bleyl, Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff, were all born between 1880 and 1884. Barth's birth in 1886 therefore places him in the midst of the Expressionist generation, just as his first significant published article in 1909 parallels the timing of the emergence of Expressionism. Nothing should be read into such circumstantial details on their own, of course.

is perhaps not completely surprising that its confidence and energy ran out in the early 1920's, as its leading practitioners reached middle age. Yet within its life-span of little more than a decade it made a dramatic impact on German culture. The weekly journal *Der Sturm*, founded in 1910 by Herwarth Walden, a principal advocate of the new art in Berlin, rapidly achieved a circulation of 30,000 copies. At the second of Walden's exhibitions in Berlin in 1912 (showing the art of the Italian Futurists), there were sometimes 1,000 visitors a day.[17]

One area of significant activity hardly mentioned so far was the theatre. In drama Expressionism found one of its most important media. It has been suggested that while "the lyric was the form in which the new generation most naturally expressed itself, it was in the drama that it found the most effective means of disseminating its ideas".[18] Developments in drama paralleled the emergence of the new literature and art. The shift in painting from representation to an emphasis on form, colour and expression, was matched by a shift in drama away from realistic characterization and narrative to the use of abstraction and extreme symbolism. The characters were frequently referred to by their roles - the Son, the Father, the Girl, and so on - rather than by personal names. Realistic characterization is replaced by the use of characters to represent ideas. Sokel highlights this contrast by noting the differing approaches to speech:

> In the realistic drama each character has his more-or-less fixed idiom even as he possesses a more-or-less constant personality, molded by milieu, heredity, and sum total of experiences. ... As in real life we can recognize and type a character by his speech. His speech distinguishes him from other characters; it marks the boundaries of his individuality, setting him off from other individualities. ... The Expressionist reverses this principle, since speech for him is not a means of characterization, but a function of expression. A character changes his speech as he changes his mood.[19]

Oskar Kokoschka's *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* of 1908 has been described as the first attempt at Expressionism drama, but it is Reinhard Sorge's *Der Bettler* of 1911 that is more commonly taken as the first fully fledged

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17 See Dube, op. cit. 159-60.

18 Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 19. See also Ludwig Marcuse in Raabe, *EGE*, 293. "Expressionism really came to life on the stage; the stage made it into a cult".

19 Sokel, *WE*, 40.

Expressionist play.[20] Sorge's play certainly illustrates well many of the characteristic features of Expressionist drama. Its characters are not realistically portrayed: they are designated by their roles rather than personal names; the beggar's father, a retired engineer, plans a project to use the canals on Mars for the improvement of the world. He kills a bird to use its blood since he has run out of red ink for his plans and the shops are closed. He beats a toy drum "with an exaggeratedly big stick".[21]

He illustrates, therefore, the dream-like qualities of characters in Expressionist drama. They are not "lifeless abstractions",[22] but neither are they realistic. Sokel comments: "some strange detail, some distortion or implausible exaggeration, a grotesque twist, an intentional incongruity, appearances at empirically impossible times and places, again and again destroy our illusion that we might face three-dimensional persons of flesh and blood in these dramas".[23] In this respect Expressionist abstraction goes significantly beyond the symbolism often found in neo-Romantic drama. Thomas points this out by means of the example of Hoffmanthal's *Elektra*. She:

> retains her individuality; she is still a woman and interesting as a woman. She is a personality in whom one quality, the quality of revenge, has been stressed to the almost complete absorption of all others. In *Der Bettler* on the other hand, the Father makes no corresponding impression of individuality. He has been conceived in association with an *idea* of which he becomes the outward and visible sign.[24]

This abandonment of realism, which brings ideas to the forefront of the drama, is also reflected in the structure of plays: "there is hardly any action in the usual sense of the term, and the play moves towards a climax not in the working out of an action but of an idea".[25]

Der Bettler is also interesting for its content: here too it is illustrative of the

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[20] See H.F. Garten *Modern German Drama* (Methuen, London, 1959), 108 to 115. See also Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 19f. and Sokel, *WE*, 36-7 and 147.
[21] Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 29.
[22] Sokel, *WE*, 36.
[23] Ibid. 37.
[24] Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 25.
[25] Ibid. 27.

typical concerns of Expressionist drama. Perhaps the most important idea it displays is the conflict between a son and his father. This theme appeared in many plays, often with violent consequences.[26] In *Der Bettler*, the contrast between the Beggar and the Father highlights the Messianic idealism of the Beggar in his search for meaning and salvation. As Sokel says: "In contrast to the Son's idealism, the Father represents the materialistic counterpoint in the composition. He misinterprets the Messianic theme materialistically as technical progress and enrichment."[27] The Father/Son motif in Expressionist drama symbolizes the conflict between the younger generation and the established order, the clash between the old art and the new art, and therefore between the old ideals and the Expressionist 'new man'. It is one more embodiment of the 'oppositeness' which permeated Expressionist activity.

In the years before the outbreak of the War, then, Expressionism was a potent force in drama as in lyric poetry. What of the visual arts, though, and painting in particular, with which I began? There was in fact significant continuity between the new movements in literature and art. An obvious parallel is in the sense that both writers and artists had of the necessity of getting below surface reality to the heart of the subject. This connection is described by Richard Samuel:

> The difference between Impressionist and Expressionist style can be illustrated by a comparison of the painting of Manet and Marc. If the former, for example, paints a bull he depicts not only every detail of the animal, but he also elaborates with meticulous care the setting in which it is placed, the grass, the bushes and the sky. With Marc on the other hand, the bull occupies three quarters of the canvas and the landscape serves only the purpose of throwing into relief the central object. ... Whereas Manet's purpose is to portray the animal as an object of nature, Marc's aim is to reveal its 'soul.' The same principle is applied to literature.[28]

Samuel expands on this by summarizing the ideas of Kasimir Edschmid, one of the first to theorize about the nature of Expressionism. He says: "Whereas the Impressionists aimed merely at reproducing in the most subtle form the

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[26] Peter Gay, in his *Weimar Culture*, even felt it appropriate to give his chapter on Expressionism the title "The Revolt of the Son: Expressionist Years". See Gay *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1969).

[27] Sokel, *WE*, 37.

[28] Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 146.

impression that an object or situation made upon them, the Expressionists endeavour to express its inner meaning." A quotation from Edschmid illustrates this: "A house is no longer merely a subject for an artist, consisting of stone, ugly or beautiful; it has to be looked at until it is liberated from the muffled restraint of a false reality, until everything that is latent within it is expressed." To concentrate on the external appearance would be to be deceived, misled by a superficial bourgeois attitude. Samuel's summary of the Expressionist approach is this: "Once the bourgeois mask is torn away the link with eternity given to every human being will be revealed."[29] Edschmid was typical of many in seeing in the inner life a link with eternity. Samuel summarizes:

> Edschmid claims that reality must be created by ourselves, because only in our own soul is the image of the world kept pure and unfalsified. Accordingly the traditional modes of art no longer suffice, for 'the field covered by the Expressionist artist is vision.' Creative work therefore can only be achieved by 'intuition.'[30]

One of the most significant painters of this period was Wassily Kandinsky - yet he was in many ways untypical of the Expressionists. He was 20 years older than most of them, and was Russian rather than German. More importantly, his drive towards the development of a genuinely abstract art was not wholly typical of Expressionist painting. But this drive, and the influential theories of art which accompanied it, make him particularly important. He was prominent in the new German art of the period in virtue of his involvements in firstly the Munich Neue Künstlervereinigung and subsequently Der Blaue Reiter. Kandinsky's understanding of art is in many ways quite consistent with the Expressionism already described. His emphasis was firmly on the expressive aim and character of art. This stress on expression led him to think in terms of the musicalization of painting. In his *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* published in 1911, he says this:

> With few exceptions music has been for some centuries the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but rather to the expression of the artist's soul, in musical sound. A painter, who finds no satisfaction in mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most

[29] Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 11.
[30] Ibid. 12.

> non-material of the arts today, achieves this end. He naturally seeks to apply the methods of music to his own art. And from this results that modern desire for rhythm in painting, for mathematical, abstract construction, for repeated notes of colour, for setting colour in motion.[31]

Kandinsky was not the only artist to think in these terms. Matisse, for example, wrote "From the relationship I have found in all the tones there must result a living harmony of colours, a harmony analogous to that of a musical composition."[32] As Christopher Butler comments, this "appeal to the idea of musical harmony runs right through the modern period".[33] The emphasis on expression and the freedom from mimetic convention had also begun to bear fruit in music itself. Kandinsky and Franz Marc heard a concert of Schoenberg's music in January 1911 and immediately recognized its kinship with their own work. Marc, writing to August Macke, said "I was constantly reminded of Kandinsky's large *Composition*, which also permits no trace of tonality".[34] Kandinsky and Schoenberg entered into correspondence; the almanac *Der blaue Reiter*, edited by Kandinsky and Marc, and published in 1912, contained an essay by Schoenberg as well as music by Schoenberg, Webern and Berg.[35] Schoenberg also exhibited some oil paintings as part of the first *Der blaue Reiter* exhibition in December 1911.[36]

For Kandinsky, art which aims at musical harmony has a fundamentally spiritual role: "Every man who steeps himself in the spiritual possibilities of his art is a valuable helper in the building of the spiritual pyramid which will some day reach to heaven."[37] In a sense, his drive towards abstraction is a drive away from the unspiritual world of appearances to an inner spiritual reality. Butler puts it like this: "Kandinsky believed that if physical matter was in any case on the point of dissolving in the coming Apocalypse, there was little point in continuing to represent aspects of the natural world in

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31 ET by M.T.H. Sadler, published as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, (Constable, London, 1914). Republished as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Dover, New York, 1977). See p. 19.
32 Quoted by Butler, *EM*, 36.
33 Ibid. 36.
34 Quoted ibid. 47.
35 *Der Blaue Reiter* edited by Kandinsky and Marc, (R. Piper & Co. Verlag, München, 1912). ET: *The Blaue Reiter Almanac* (Thames And Hudson, London, 1974).
36 Dube, op. cit. 101.
37 *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 20.

painting."[38] Another aspect of this is the interest that Kandinsky and others had in primitive art, folk art and in the painting of children. They saw in these an expressive character, a relative freedom from mimetic convention. These interests perhaps also reflect a negative judgement on the nature of modern European civilization, in particular its perceived rationalism and materialism.[39] In *Über die Geistige in der Kunst*, Kandinsky was scathing about all forms of materialism, including socialist economics, democratic and republican politics, and modern science.[40]

ii. The social and political context of Expressionism.

The diverse strands within Expressionism came together most obviously in opposition to the established order and therefore to the modes of artistic activity that reflected and affirmed that order. And in so far as Expressionism sensed the inadequacy and imminent collapse of this order its apprehensions were not unique to writers and artists, but were widespread. As J.M. Ritchie has put it:

> Germany before the outbreak of the First World War was filled with a longing for change. People wanted something to happen—almost anything, to bring release from the oppressive traditions and conventions of the society they lived in. Life in Wilhelminian Germany meant for many a state of emptiness and boredom in which the dictum *Ruhe ist die erste Bürgerpflicht* still applied. Little wonder then that talk of *Aufbruch*, i.e. the need for a new start, a break with the old, was wide-spread and was not merely one of the many slogans coined by avant-garde contributors to Expressionist journals with inflammatory titles like *Storm* and *Action*. Indeed in a sense it is

[38] Butler, *EM*, 38.

[39] There is undoubtedly a connection with the interest of Expressionist writers in Chinese and oriental literature and art. Sokel notes: "Some of the best lyric poetry of Expressionism is, like the poetry of Surrealism, imagist in character. The sharply outlined dreamlike image or image-scene forms its basis. It resembles in this respect the poetry of the Far East with its brief evocative scenes and largely visual appeal to the emotions. This similarity is not accidental. Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, which deeply influenced both Surrealism and Expressionism, were in turn influenced by Mlle Gautier's French translations of Oriental poetry, and strong interest in Chinese and Japanese poetry and art preceded the rise of Imagist poetry in English, Surrealist poetry in French, and Expressionist poetry in German." Sokel, *WE*, 43.

[40] There was perhaps a reflection here of the longstanding German tendency to contrast civilization unfavourably with culture, stated famously by Thomas Mann in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* of 1918: "Deutschtum, das ist Kultur, Seele, Freiheit, Kunst und *nicht* Zivilisation, Gesellschaft, Stimmrecht, Literatur." Mann *Gesammelte Werke* (12 vols.) Frankfurt am Main, 1960, xii, 31.

> misleading to repeat the idea that the Expressionists were singled out from their contemporaries by their pre-visions of war, doom and destruction, chaos and annihilation, the twilight of man-kind,—they were merely giving their particular form of expression to much more widely held longings for release from unbearable restrictions.[41]

What, though, was the source of these apprehensions? What were the unbearable restrictions that were so widely felt? An answer here requires attention to the state of German society more widely. Europe in general, and Germany in particular, had undergone a rapid process of economic modernization in the period prior to 1914; and this process was one of the chief sources of the pressures reflected in modernist movements. As David Harvey writes: "Modernism is a troubled and fluctuating aesthetic response to conditions of modernity produced by a particular process of modernization."[42] For a description of these conditions, Harvey turns to the analysis of capitalism formulated by Marx and Engels in *The communist manifesto*. They argued there that the new international economic order had been bought at a price:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier times. All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober sense the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men.[43]

The process of capitalist modernization, Harvey summarizes, tends towards a disruption of social relations and experience, marked by "individualism, alienation, fragmentation, ephemerality, innovation, creative destruction, speculative development, unpredictable shifts in methods of production and consumption (wants and needs), a shifting experience of space and time, as well as a crisis-ridden dynamic of social change".[44]

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41 In his introduction to *Vision and Aftermath: Four Expressionist War Plays* trans. J.M. Ritchie and J.D. Stowell, (Calder & Boyars, London, 1969), 7.
42 David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989), 99.
43 Quoted by Harvey, op. cit. 100.
44 Ibid. 111.

Certainly Germany's population and economy had grown steadily and rapidly throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. The middle of the nineteenth century was the point at which Germany turned from its pre-industrial past and began to become a modern industrial society. In the words of Walther Rathenau in 1912: "Through the middle of the last century runs a sharp division. Beyond it lies the old age, old fashioned culture, past history; on this side are our fathers and us, the modern age, the present."[45] There had been steady movement of population away from rural areas and employment in agriculture and forestry to urban areas and employment in industry.[46] By 1914, both Berlin and Vienna had reached a population of two million.[47] New technology - railways and trams, the motor car, the bicycle, the telephone, the typewriter, domestic and industrial electricity - transformed urban life during these years.[48] The social institutions of Wilhelmine Germany, however, were placed under pressure by the steady construction of a modern industrial economy. There was a widely felt need for a new ordering of society; but the inflexibility of pre-war patterns meant that the task of social modernization was not able to begin in earnest until after the war.[49]

By the end of the War, then, there was a widespread desire not just for a new political leadership, but for a fundamental change, for some decisively new social order. Hopes for a new social order were greatly intensified by the events of the War years: by disillusionment about the War itself, which grew considerably after the initial euphoria of 1914; by virtue of the

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45 Walther Rathenau 'Zur Kritik der Zeit' in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. i, (Berlin, 1925), 11. Quoted in Ritchie Robertson *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985), 38. (My translation.)

46 See W.H. Bruford *Germany in the Eighteenth Century: The Social Background of the Literary Revival* (C.U.P., Cambridge, 1935), 159-60.

47 Robertson, *Kafka*, 38.

48 See Norman Stone *Europe Transformed 1878-1919* (Glasgow, 1983), 79-81, quoted in Robertson, *Kafka*, 38-9.

49 See D. Peukert *The Weimar Republic* trans. R. Deveson, (Penguin, London, 1991), 277: "The years before the outbreak of the First World War had already been marked by the challenges of modernization, by a questioning of previously undisputed assumptions about society and culture ... After the war these phenomena took centre stage, stripped of the familiar reassuring veils of national mythology which had still disguised them during the Wilhelmine era. ... The Janus-faced nature of the process of modernization became a fact of everyday life; it dominated cultural discourse."

significant hardships suffered by civilians as well as the military; and by the outcome of the War - defeat for Germany. In June 1917 there were hunger strikes on naval vessels; in July the Reichstag passed a resolution calling for an honourable peace; there were many strikes and other acts of dissent and protest, through 1917 and 1918. As Peukert notes: "The euphoria that had swept through the masses in 1914 had long since given way to disillusionment".[50] The combined effect of the pre-War pressures for modernization and the experience of the War meant that when the conflict ended and the Republic was proclaimed, extravagant hopes were invested in the new era.

Inevitably, many of these hopes were disappointed. The expectations placed in the Weimar Republic were far too great; but most importantly the political and economic circumstances in which it was born greatly constrained its successive governments. Disillusionment was not slow in coming. Ronald Taylor quotes a diary entry of Count Kessler: "Thursday, May 1, 1919. A national holiday. Everything closed, even restaurants and bars. An atmosphere of national mourning for the revolution that came to naught."[51] The reasons for this rapid disappointment are complex. As mentioned above, the hopes invested in the Republic were unrealistic from the start. And undoubtedly the conflicts and disagreements between different social and political groups did not help. But an important additional factor was that there was a social and political vacuum left by the end of the monarchy and the rejection of the concept of monarchist government. To a large extent the administration of affairs went on much as it had done before, but without the monarchial structure which had legitimated it, providing a focus for a sense of national values and identity. Taylor quotes Rudolf Wissell, a Socialist minister in the first Republican government, speaking in June 1919:

> We have been governing in the old ways, and there has been little sign of a new spirit infusing the old procedures ... The essential character of German culture and social life has hardly changed, and even the few observable changes have hardly been for the better. The people believe that the achievements of the revolution are purely negative in character, that the only difference is in the set of officials who exercise military and

[50] Peukert, op. cit. 25.

[51] Taylor, op. cit. 12.

> bureaucratic control, and that the principles of the present government do not differ in essence from those of the former régime.[52]

Republicanism and parliamentary democracy were not exactly well rooted traditions in German public life, and there were from the start reactionary elements which portrayed them as foreign imports, unfit for the German people.[53] The Republic's legitimacy was further undermined by the problems and crises of its early years: the widespread anger at the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and particularly its 'war-guilt clause';[54] outrage at the French invasion of the Ruhr in 1923; continuing political tensions and crises, including the 'Spartacist uprising' of January 1919, the Munich *Räterepublik* of April-May 1919, the Kapp putsch of March 1920, outbreaks of fighting between left and right wing militias, the murders of prominent figures in political and public life; all against the background of an economy unable to provide for and sustain the reconstruction of German society, and which collapsed in an inflationary spiral in 1923.

Yet for all this the Weimar Republic was in many ways a period of remarkable success. Peukert says:

> It was during the Weimar years that the main features of the contemporary world took shape and that modern ideas and movements in social policy, technology, the sciences, the humanities, art, music, architecture and literature achieved their breakthrough. In less than a decade and a half virtually every social and intellectual initiative we think of as modern was formulated or put into practice.[55]

Despite its flaws, and despite the economic difficulties which undermined it and greatly contributed to its end, it nonetheless achieved to an extraordinary degree the modernization of German society. It was, as Peukert notes, not only a time of economic, political and social crisis: it was

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[52] Taylor, op. cit. 12.

[53] Taylor, p. 12, mentions Oswald Spengler's view that "the war had taught Germany nothing: she had failed to find her true, that is, Prussian, self, with the qualities on which alone could the true German state be built, and attempts to import such alien traditions as those of English liberalism and French democracy, let alone the ponderous superficial principles of Marxist class-warfare, would quickly be shown up for the irrelevancies that they were."

[54] An excellent account of the settlement at Versailles can be found in A. Lentin *Guilt at Versailles. Lloyd George and the pre-history of Appeasement* (Methuen, London, 1985).

[55] Peukert, op. cit. 275-6.

also "the archetypal emblem of what we understand by modernity".[56]

iii. After 1914: Expressionism, war and peace.

Expressionism was by no means isolated from all that was going on around it. The link between its restlessness in the Wilhelmine world and a more widespread sense of unrest has already been noted. The development of Expressionism through the war years and into the Republic continued to reflect the social and political situation. Perhaps the most visible example of this was the Messianic Expressionism (as Sokel calls it) which was characteristic of the period around the end of the War. In it the "*visualization* of subconscious or existential states became the *vision* of social renewal".[57] Expressionist longings were transferred "to the ethical and utopian-political sphere".[58] At its best it combined ethical idealism and psychological insight in a vision of "inner regeneration through outer revolt".[59] Expressionism united, then, with the general tendency to invest the fledgling Republic with extraordinary expectations for social and spiritual renewal. It is a great mistake, though, to think of this movement, with its ecstatic proclamation of the 'new man', as the whole of Expressionism. Just as there was a wide spectrum in the earliest Expressionist writers between visions of destruction and hope, so there is a wide spectrum of views in the wartime and post-war periods, in relation to social and political reality.[60]

R. Hinton Thomas offered a typology differentiating three further

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[56] Peukert, op. cit. 164.

[57] Sokel, *WE*, 162.

[58] Ibid. 111.

[59] Ibid. 163.

[60] Sokel's view is therefore distinct from the line taken in Paulsen's influential study *Expressionismus und Activismus*. Paulsen distinguished an activist tendency from Expressionism proper: activism, he suggested, was marked by its concern with practical social and political reform, in distinction from Expressionism proper which strongly resisted the compromises such an approach necessarily involved. Activism, however, is better seen as a divergent stand *within* Expressionism. Certainly several individuals who would have to be classed as activists - Ernst Toller, Johannes Becher, Walter Hasenclever and Georg Kaiser - were significant figures in the development of Expressionism. The activist tendency was, moreover, present within Expressionism right from the beginning. The journal *Die Aktion* identified itself from the start with radicalism in literature and politics, and called for the formation of a "great German Left". See Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 92. See also Raabe, *EGE*, 37, where Claire Jung, recalling the years 1910-11, refers to *Die Aktion* as a "literary and political journal".

tendencies besides activism: first a group who share much of the rationalism of the activists, but not their hopes, taking, on the whole, a sceptical view of social reality - writers like Gustav Sack and Gottfried Benn; secondly a more optimistic strand which tends towards nationalism, in that it sees the bond between individual and nation as offering the hope of the new community; third the purest group in Thomas' view, which he calls the religious Expressionists. These writers did not identify Expressionist hopes with any particular vision of social renewal, focussing more intensely on the individual, on spiritual transformation, or on the relation of God and humanity - figures like Franz Werfel, Kasimir Edschmid, and Paul Kornfeld.

Attitudes to social and political issues were brought into sharper focus by the political events of the period, most notably the War. Many Expressionist artists and writers (whether activist or not) took a strongly anti-War stance in 1914. Some served in the military despite this; others did not - several of them leaving Germany for neutral Switzerland. Others joined in the general mood of cathartic enthusiasm for the war. When disillusion set in however, particularly in 1916, faced with the barbarity and apparent senselessness of the conflict, this group's outlook changed.[61] 'Transformation' (Wandlung) became a key description not only of the experience of this group but of its message. Ernst Toller is perhaps the most striking representative of this. He was a volunteer at the beginning of the war and served for two years at the front line. After his health had broken down, he experienced a profound personal transformation, and wrote the partly autobiographical play *Die Wandlung*.[62] Its message is "humanity". In his final speech the main character, Friedrich, lambasts the repressiveness of the old order - its authoritarianism, the dehumanizing routine of industrialized labour, the misery and degradation of urban poverty. To people living under such conditions Friedrich offers his gospel of humanity: "you could still be men

[61] There was, then, a gradual convergence between different strands of Expressionism in their view of the War. Samuel comments: "All the writers believed that the War was mainly the outcome of a decayed state of society, ruled by the combined forces of mammonism and State-autocracy, which must be destroyed before new aims could be realised. ... They were filled with enthusiastic hope that the new day had dawned and that their ideals could be attained." (Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 101-2)

[62] It was begun in 1917 and completed in prison in 1919. It had its first performance in Berlin that year and made a great impact. See *Expressionist Texts* Ed. M. Gordon, (PAJ publications, New York, 1986), 156.

and women, still be human, if only you had faith in yourselves and in humanity, if only you would grant the spirit its fulfilment". The response comes: "To think that we ever forgot! We are men, men and women!" The play concludes with a call for the people to go out and proclaim revolution, a cry which the crowd takes up and repeats enthusiastically.[63]

The war years brought an upturn in interest in Expressionism, particularly for drama, which had made a limited public impact before the war. Many of the early Expressionist plays had to wait several years for a performance.[64] During the course of the War there was a widespread shift in public attitudes: "The wave of patriotic enthusiasm subsided, the military situation grew worse and the economic situation inside Germany threatened starvation." This led to an atmosphere altogether more receptive to Expressionism:

> In the deep spiritual and material distress caused by the War, only one hope remained, namely that after the War there would come a brighter and better time. ... It is intelligible, therefore, that the apocalyptic messages of the young writers were more heeded in the later years of the War than the more traditional poetry.[65]

However the experience of war gave the Expressionist an even greater cause to hope for better future. As Sokel noted they expected their own *Wandlung* to be mirrored everywhere:

> The World War seemed to be everybody's fault. But it was also everybody's punishment. It was the inferno. Men, the Expressionists believed, could not endure the losses and heartbreaks which war inflicted without changing profoundly. Exaggerating the limited echoes they did find, the Expressionists believed that the whole nation shared the experience they themselves underwent. They underestimated the persistence of traditional patterns of behaviour. They had the eschatological faith in the final event, ... the *Wandlung*, which would ring out at the end of history and usher in the beginning of perfection. Any road out of hell, they thought, would have to

63 Gordon, *Expressionist Texts*, 206-7.

64 For example *Der Bettler*, though published in 1912, was not performed until after Sorge's death in the war in 1916. See Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 34-5: "*Der Bettler* was first produced by the 'Gesellschaft des Jungen Deutschland' on 23rd December, 1917, but it had been influential since its publication five years previously." (See also Raabe, *EGE*, 235.) Another example is Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, also written in 1912 but not produced until 1917. Prior to 1917, Kaiser had seen only two of his twenty five plays performed. See Gordon, ibid. 48.

65 Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 102.

lead to paradise.[66]

The proclamation of the Republic on the 9th of November 1918 seemed to many Expressionists to offer hope for the realization of their dreams. This was particularly true of the activists; but the early years of the Weimar Republic were the heyday of all branches of Expressionism. Plays that had struggled to gain a first performance were produced all over Germany; poets that had sold only a few copies on first publication became widely known through bestselling anthologies. The outsiders of the Empire, as Peter Gay noted, became the insiders of the Republic. The pattern was repeated time and again: "ideas developed in the Empire, given political direction by the War, and finding open expression in the revolution".[67]

As noted earlier, though, disillusionment with the revolution and the Republic set in quickly. Inevitably, therefore, the "ecstasy of the activist-Expressionist vision lasts only for a moment in history".[68] The important thing to note, though, is that the loss of faith in the immediate realization of a utopian society and the associated 'demise of the new man'[69] did not mean the abandonment of Expressionism as such. It did not even mean the abandonment of its hopes. On the contrary there was a reaction *within* Expressionism suggesting both disillusionment with messianic optimism and a reinterpretation of its eschatological hopes.

Not surprisingly this tendency is evident among some of the more idealist Expressionists. Paul Kornfeld, for example, talked in his 1918 essay 'Der beseelte und psychologische Mensch' of the need to supersede the state rather than transform it: 'The mission of Art is to draw man's attention away from the meaningless world of politics to 'that world in which the qualities

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[66] Sokel, *WE*, 179-80.
[67] Gay *Weimar Culture* 9.
[68] Sokel, *WE*, 192.
[69] See B.D. Webb *The Demise of the New Man: an analysis of ten plays from late German Expressionism* (Kummerle, Goppinger, 1973).

of his higher spiritual nature are alive.' "[70] However even among the activists a new outlook is evident: a 'second *Wandlung*' takes place. Ernst Toller's *Masse-Mensch* (Man and the Masses) written in 1919 is a good example. Toller had played a leading role in the failed Munich *Räterepublik* of the spring of that year. One of the painful lessons of that experience had been his discovery of the great gap between his intellectual-humanitarian socialism and the outlook of the masses. Toller discovered that his fellow revolutionaries

> were motivated not by the dream of man's divinity but by hatred of the bourgeois. They wanted to shoot all bourgeois hostages, whom Toller tried to save at the risk of his life. For this humanitarianism, his Communist allies denounced him as 'petty bourgeois' and had him arrested.[71]

Masse-Mensch differs from the earlier *Die Wandlung* in that the intellectual is separated from the masses by an unbridgeable gulf. Where the hero of the earlier work, Friedrich, had succeeded in stirring the people to follow him, the Woman in *Masse-Mensch* fails in her appeals and is left alone. But pessimism is not the necessary result of the second *Wandlung*: the Woman renounces violence completely, even though to do so will cost her her life. She still believes that a better world will come, but it has been pushed into a distant future. This reduced and modified optimism was fragile, however. Sokel pointed out that in his correspondence during this period Toller lamented his loss of activist faith and bemoaned the isolation which the second *Wandlung* implies - isolation from the proletariat as well as the bourgeoisie.[72] Toller's drama *Hinkemann* of 1921-22, conveys a strong sense of the inescapable tragedy of existence. This is not to say that optimism has been extinguished entirely, though. Killing and mockery go on and on but they are not necessary. Things could be different. The play ends on an

[70] Quoted in Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 116. This tendency, of course, posed some quite serious dangers for the Republic. Note the comments of Martin Swales: "it is important to note that a great deal of what passed for political debate in the short-lived existence of the Weimar Republic was curiously devoid of a modest and practical consideration of political aims and means. The legacy of Expressionism was anything but helpful in this respect: over and over again political aspirations were framed in terms of some vatic transfiguration of banal reality: redemption (Erlösung) rather than legislation assumes a central place in the political vocabulary." M. Swales "In Defence of Weimar: Thomas Mann and the Politics of Republicanism" in *Weimar Germany: Writers and Politics* ed. A.F. Bance, (Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1982), 7.

[71] Sokel, *WE*, 196-7.

[72] Ibid. 200-1.

ambiguous note: "Any day can bring the Kingdom of Heaven, any night the End of the World."[73] Hope exists, albeit in symbiosis with judgement.

The extent of the recoil from activism is demonstrated by Fritz von Unruh's *Platz* of 1920, in which the antagonist of the Expressionist hero also speaks in an Expressionist manner.[74] The play indicates the self-accusation of Expressionism, the fear that the new world envisaged by activism actually tended towards the demagogic and tyrannical. A similar movement is evident in Max Brod's novel of 1919, *Das grosse Wagnis* (The Great Risk). It satirises the activist ideal by presenting a community of 'new men' which is supposed to embody reason and freedom but which in fact becomes a totalitarian nightmare. Brod was in this period moving towards embracing Zionism. His second *Wandlung* meant a narrowing of hope from a universal ideal of humanity to a religious-national programme. Sokel calls this "both a restriction and an interiorization of hope."[75] It is a typical development of late Expressionism: as some embraced Zionism, others (such as Hanns Johst) embraced Nazism, while others (Johannes Becher for example) turned to Communism. The pattern had been established much earlier by Sorge, who had converted to Roman Catholicism by 1914.[76]

iv. Expressionism in the context of modernism.

I want now to turn from the particular history of Expressionism to the wider context provided by modernism. There are two questions that need to be addressed: what were the fundamental concerns of cultural modernism in the early years of this century?; and how does Expressionism relate to this international modernism and its concerns? The first of these questions will be addressed primarily in this section; the second will be dealt with primarily in the next. A good place to begin is with David Harvey's observation, noted above, that the modernity produced by technological

[73] *Vision and Aftermath* op. cit. 208. Sokel notes, though, that there were other outcomes: Georg Kaiser in particular never regained the activist optimism of 1919, his late work being decidedly pessimistic.

[74] Sokel, *WE*, 203-5. See also Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 162.

[75] Ibid. 209.

[76] Many other examples could be given. Herwarth Walden turned to communism and emigrated to Russia, while Lothar Schreyer, his friend and colleague on *Der Sturm*, gave his allegiance to the Christian Church. See Raabe, *EGE*, 199.

change and economic modernization tends towards a disruption of social relations and experience. In particular, Harvey emphasizes the extent to which ephemerality and contingency characterize modern experience.

It is interesting, then, that the most common denominator of modernism was its break with the notion of art as representation, or at least with the established conventions of representation. George Steiner has drawn attention to how nineteenth century poets such as Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Hölderlin began to think in terms of poetry as a subversion of the conventions of everyday language, rather than just an extension of them. These poets helped initiate a "new programme for language and for literature" whose "subversions of linearity, of the logic of time and of cause so far as they are mirrored in grammar ... are far more than a poetic strategy. They embody a revolt of literature against language."[77] Christopher Butler notes a related movement in late nineteenth century art subverting the established conventions of representation. He uses the example of Cézanne's *Apples and Oranges* of c. 1899, in which the perspective is not 'true', and the relation of the objects in the picture seems to suggest that the artist had moved about and painted his subject from slightly different angles. Contemporary critics of such work, he notes, questioned whether Cézanne's vision was defective, or whether his technique was simply inadequate. Yet it quickly became appreciated that such painting was concerned with the overall form of the image, rather than with traditional descriptive convention. Butler quotes the critic Émile Bernard, writing in 1904 of how Cézanne had advanced beyond Impressionism, in his

> raising of form towards a decorative conception and of colour towards the most musical pitch. So that as the artist works on, the further he gets from objectivity, from the opacity of the model he started from, and the deeper he goes into sheer painting for its own sake: the more he abstracts his picture, the more broadly he simplifies it, after a narrow, conforming, hesitant commencement.[78]

Butler notes how such paintings draw attention to the fact that they are designs on flat surfaces, and as such make their own methods visible. When

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[77] Steiner *After Babel: aspects of language and translation* (OUP, London, 1975), 183. Quoted by Butler, *EM*, 8-9.
[78] Butler, *EM*, 13.

this is appreciated, Cézanne's paintings can be appreciated as a series, "intriguing the spectator by displaying the development of their own method".[79] This introduces a powerful relativism into the practice and appreciation of painting, since "no one version can claim to be adequate to the complexity of the objects it purports to represent". There is more than one way of seeing, more than one set of conventions by which the painter may depict his or her subject. Modernist literature offers parallel examples of this relativism: Butler draws attention to the deliberate use of stylistic variation in modernist writing, citing the divergent styles employed in the different episodes of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as a climax of this tendency.[80] The avant-garde nature of the movements that constitute modernism is related to this relativism: an emphasis on experimental technique and individual style is the means by which the old conventions can be superseded or destroyed.

Does this emphasis on the conventions of artistic production, though, mean that modernism's concerns were essentially aesthetic? Was it at bottom a self-critical examination by artists of their own procedures? Such formalist approaches have certainly been advocated by influential critics, such as Clement Greenberg.[81] Butler rightly rejects such accounts emphatically, arguing instead that the new techniques of modernism reflect new ideas. The relativism inherent in modernism's rejection of established conventions of representation reflects a relativism in modern experience, a sense that the world of appearance is not the world of truth, a doubt about the human capacity to grasp truth in the midst of appearance, and ultimately about the ability of human language to connect to anything outside itself. The crisis of artistic representation intimates a crisis in our confidence in our ability to represent the world to ourselves in language, a crisis of the word. It is here that modernism connects to the situation described by Harvey. The experience of modernity, marked by ephemerality and contingency,

79 Butler, *EM*, 14.

80 Ibid. 29.

81 Ibid. 14. See Clement Greenberg 'Modernist Painting' in *Art and Literature* no. 4, (Spring 1965) 193-201, reproduced in *Modern Art and Modernism* (Harper & Row, London, 1982), 5-10. The tenor of Greenberg's view is indicated by the following quote: "Realistic, illusionist art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art. ... Whereas one tends to see what is *in* an Old Master before seeing it as a picture, one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first." (p. 6.)

undermines the stable modes of representation employed in realistic fiction and art.

Harvey expands on this by emphasizing the importance of our changing experience of space and time as a result of technological innovation and economic modernization. He suggests that the development of capitalist modes of production and the consequent industrialization and urbanization of society, including the development of new technologies of communication, resulted in a crisis in people's experience of space and time. He characterizes this process by the phrase 'space–time compression', which he explains as follows:

> I mean to signal by that term processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us. ... As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications and a 'spaceship earth' of economic and ecological interdependencies - to use just two familiar and everyday images, and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of compression of our spatial and temporal worlds.[82]

The rapid industrial and economic development of Europe from 1850-1914 resulted, Harvey suggests, in just this experience of 'space-time compression'. The importance of this for cultural modernism is that it led to a crisis of representation. The changing experience of space and time "undermined the cogency and meaning of realist fiction and painting".[83] Realistic art necessarily depicts a particular time and a particular place; but the rapidly shrinking horizons of space and time undermine the necessary sense of fixed space and linear time.

The varied directions taken by modernism can be understood, then, both as expressions of a crisis of representation, and as responses to the distinctive ephemerality and transience of modern life. The emphasis on expression reflects a shift in attention from the outer world of appearance and change;

[82] Harvey, op. cit. 240.
[83] Ibid. 265.

value and truth are sought in intuitively grasped emotion, rather than in the material realm. Abstraction tends to serve expressive ends, displacing the goal of representation entirely, in many cases. Cubism, on the other hand, while it was an extension of earlier attacks on realism, began as a radically new way of representing, a form of simplification rather than abstraction.[84] Unlike Kandinsky, neither Braque nor Picasso provided any theoretical account of their ideas or aims.[85] However one of the their early followers, Jean Metzinger, provided what has proved a valuable insight, pointing out that Cubism had "uprooted the prejudice that commanded the painter to remain motionless in front of the object".[86] The fragmentation of space in Cubist painting can be seen, in other words, as resulting from the use of various views of the object painted. The point usually taken from this is that such paintings contain the experience of passing time. They break with methods of painting which attempt to capture the object at one particular moment. This thought is taken up by Harvey, who suggests that Cubism "tried to represent time through a fragmentation of space".[87] The Cubist attack on realism can also be seen, in that case, as a reflection of the modern experience of fleetingness and the accelerating experience of time.[88]

A useful additional point about Cubism is the observation that it is

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[84] Butler argues, though, that its rapid development took it very quickly in the direction of abstract art: "His [Braque's] work then evolved with startling speed towards painting in which representational elements are not much more than alluded to, so that the image serves intuitively conceived expressive purposes of a very complex kind. Its implied aesthetic, if not its method, is in the end very similar to that of Schoenberg and Kandinsky, though not perceived to be so at the time. This is because as Cubism 'progresses', subservience to an object ... is so adroitly blocked, that the rationale for the painting has ultimately to lie within the artist's creative play." (p. 56) Butler therefore is able to point out that "early Cubism is at base just as 'Expressionist' as the work of Kandinsky, because the placing of most of the elements within the picture plane is intuitive and unconstrained by mimetic convention" (p. 69).

[85] Butler says: "The Cubists are too often credited with having had a new view of reality, whereas it seems that neither Picasso nor Braque were really capable of this kind of thought." (p. 67.) See however note 94 below.

[86] Quoted by Butler, *EM*, 69.

[87] Harvey, op. cit. 267. Harvey also notes the parallel with James Joyce's method of writing at this time, designed to capture a sense of simultaneity. Simultaneity is an extremely important theme for modernist art and literature in general: see Butler, particularly pp. 156-167. Note also van Hoddis' 'Weltende' above, in which a sense of simultaneity is important.

[88] A more explicit attempt to represent speed and movement is found in some of the work of the Italian Futurists, for example in paintings by Boccioni and in poetry by Marinetti. See Butler, 137-153.

characterized by a sense of 'spatial continuity'.[89] Butler describes this with reference to Braque's *Le Port* of 1909. He notes how areas which suggest realistic perspective are contradicted by others which seem to press forward to the picture plane, the net result being that the work appears almost like a 'bas relief' sculpture. There is no clear distinction between objects and background. In short, the picture "makes everything, sea, sky, boats, and the space in between, seem equally solid, and locked together in the picture plane."[90] The spatial continuity developed here is very evident in the pictures Braque and Picasso produced in 1909, Butler points out. In these pictures "The painter no longer respects the identities of the separate objects before which he stands, but 'materializes' the space between them."[91] Butler is wary of making too much of this aspect of Cubism, lest he be guilty of mistaking analogies for causes.

There seems to me, though, to be an obvious point to be made about this blurring of the distinction between 'subject' and 'background'. In such paintings, what are in question are the contexts of meaning in virtue of which the object is more important than the background. What is being painted is space; what is in doubt is the context which might make one piece of space (that occupied by a boat or a girl) more significant than another piece of space (that which surrounds them). There is a parallel here with the type of modernist poetry which juxtaposes apparently significant and trivial events. Van Hoddis' *Weltende* was of course a paradigmatic Expressionist example of this, where trains falling from bridges are placed alongside people having colds.[92] There are also parallels with the some of the collage-like poetry written by Apollinaire around 1913, such as 'Lundi rue Christine',[93] and indeed with the collage pictures which Picasso had begun to produce in 1912. Picasso himself later said of such works:

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[89] The phrase is Butler's, p. 59.

[90] Ibid. 59.

[91] Ibid. 60.

[92] An affinity between the apocalyptic strand of Expressionism and the fragmentation of space in early Cubismis suggested by the German painter Ludwig Meidner's comment that he did not follow Kandinsky or Matisse with their "decorative and ornamental designs" but rather Robert Delaunay "who inaugurated our movement with his grand vision of the Tour Eiffel". Quoted ibid. 178.

[93] See ibid. 165-7.

> If a piece of newspaper can become a bottle, that gives us something to think about in connection with both newspaper and bottles, too. This displaced object has entered a universe for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness. And this strangeness was what we wanted to make people think about because we were quite aware that our world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring.[94]

It is no exaggeration then to say that one of the basic impulses of modernist art and literature is to place a question mark against the contexts and conventions which have customarily organized and given meaning to experience. In drawing attention to the 'strangeness' of the world, modernist movements questioned the narratives which had served to shape it and allowed its identification as order rather than chaos. For some, this was experienced as an inevitable development of art along scientific lines; for others it was a liberation of art and even of the human spirit; for others it was perhaps primarily a loss of meaning and value. As Butler says, modernist writers:

> salvage the bits from past history that they want, or redeem fragments from the chaos of a present which has become incomprehensible in terms of traditional organizing narrative. There is an extraordinary internalization of a confusing external experience (of multiplicity, uncertainty, and conflict) into a collage whose form imposes upon us the simultaneity of things, precisely by depriving them of the usual forms of analytical interconnection. The question then haunts the rest of Modernist (and Postmodernist) art, whether this is not in fact a kind of defeat, ... a renunciation of the attempt to give an order to things, a despair of history ... .[95]

If the above account is correct, and modernism is rightly understood as more than a formalist self-examination on the part of artists and writers, then we ought to expect the preoccupations of modernism to crop up elsewhere in the period, outwith the realm of artistic and literary production. If modernism's new techniques were indeed related to ideas, we should be able to locate other instances of these ideas. Was there, then, a more widespread apprehension of a crisis of the representative power of language? Was there a relativism about apprehensions of truth and value, and a sense of the loss of contexts and conventions which had organized and given meaning to experience? I would suggest that an affirmative

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[94] Quoted by Butler, *EM*, 167, from F. Gilot and C. Lake *Life with Picasso* (New York, 1964), 77.

[95] Butler, *EM*, 175.

answer can be given. Several of the most significant contributions to modern thought betray similar concerns. Ferdinand de Saussure, generally regarded as the founder of modern linguistics, developed his most distinctive and influential ideas around 1911. He emphasized that language is a structured system of signs, which operates on the basis of arbitrary convention, by means of the relation of signs to each other in a system, at a particular time. Words have meaning in virtue of their relations to other words, rather than by a relation reference to the world. In this way Saussure's emphasis on the role of convention in language parallels the modernist doubt about the ability of language to connect to or depict a reality outside itself.

A little earlier, philosophers had begun to take a new interest in language, and, in particular, questions of the relation between language and the world. Gottlob Frege's 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung'[96] of 1892 distinguished between the semantic content of language and its reference to an object. He pointed out that there is more to meaning that the relation between language and an object, but he nonetheless affirmed the referential function of language. Frege's solution (in which names refer to objects, predicates to concepts, and sentences to truth values) was rather counter-intuitive, however, and seemed to some to be a mystification of, rather than a clarification of, the relation between language and the world. Bertrand Russell's classic paper of 1905 *On Denoting*[97] is equally concerned with the relation between language and the world, if not more so. It attempted to develop and defend a strictly referential view of meaning. To do so, Russell outlined a method of analysing the 'definite descriptions' which appear in sentences of natural language, until they consisted purely of 'logically proper names' and simple predicates or relations. Meaning is guaranteed by the reference of these 'logically proper names' to objects of immediate experience.

The apogee of referential theories of meaning was undoubtedly Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, written during the War while its author served with the Austrian Army, but not published until 1921. In

[96] Originally published in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, vol. 100 (1892), 25-50. English translation in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* ed. P. Geach and M. Black, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1952), 56-78.
[97] *Mind* (1905) 479-493.

the *Tractatus* it is not logically proper names that refer but propositions, and they do so in the manner of pictures. They must share logical form with the thing pictured; but equally they must have representational form - which is to say that they are not identical with the thing pictured. The choice of particular signs to serve as symbols in this way is acknowledged to be a matter of arbitrary convention. Like Russell's views, though, Wittgenstein's theory is a form of logical atomism: propositions in natural language must be analysed until their elements are simple, and correspond to logically simple objects.[98] The attempt to provide a theory of representation leads to the positing of logically simple objects which cannot be specified but must be supposed to exist in order for language to be meaningful. The 'linguistic turn' that such philosophies amount to reflects an increasing concern for the connection between language and the world. Wittgenstein later saw his early philosophy as unsuccessful; his concern for language remained, but he ceased to see a theory of representation as the necessary basis for understanding the meaningful use of language.[99]

It is interesting that in the very era in which art and literature turn away from realism and question the conventions of representation, linguistics and linguistic philosophy should emerge as essentially new disciplines concerned with the nature of language and its connection with the world. Further food for thought is provided by Harvey. He points to several distinct areas of significant historical change and development which can be seen to reflect the issues already raised. One such development was the new physics of Einstein, whose theories of special relativity and general relativity date from 1905 and 1916 respectively. In presenting space and time as something other than the stable, fixed categories of common sense, Einstein drew on and supported the notion of non-Euclidian geometries developed in the 19th century. As such, the new physics reinforced the relativism which was replacing the Enlightenment idea of a single, shared, rational

[98] Unlike Russell, though, Wittgenstein's atomism was not an attempt to give language an epistemological grounding.

[99] Articulating similar concerns, and part of the background to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, was the sceptical nominalism of Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zur Kritik der Sprache*, published at the beginning of the century. A useful description of Mauthner's views can be found in *Wittgenstein's Vienna* by Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1973), 120-133.

perspective on reality. "It is hard" says Harvey, "not to conclude that the whole world of representation and of knowledge underwent a fundamental transformation during this short space of time."[100]

v. Modernism, alienation and Expressionist longings.

Though discussions of modernity tend to focus on the transformation of "the whole world of representation and of knowledge", few commentators have paused to acknowledge that modernism's concerns and ideas owe an enormous debt to the writings of Immanuel Kant. Walter Sokel is one who does record the peculiar significance of Kant for modernism in general and Expressionism in particular. He says: "The philosophical foundation of modernism, and indeed a good part of its program, are to be found in Kant."[101] The reasons for this bold claim are actually very simple. "Both historically and epistemologically", Sokel points out, "the theory of mimesis is connected with the belief in a cosmos."[102] Kant, he suggests, challenged the pre-modern notion that there is a relation between the human subject and nature. Sokel's description of Kant on this point is worth quoting at length:

> Nature, for Kant, is not a given framework in which man has his place, but a construction which our mind imposes upon phenomena. Without the mind there would be no nature since there would be no quantitative formulations called laws of nature and, therefore, no ordered universe. It is we who connect phenomena through causality and relation. It is we who have to perceive phenomena in succession and call this subjective necessity time; it

[100] Harvey, op. cit. 28-9. Another development mentioned by Harvey, though less important for my purpose here, is the emergence of modern ideas and practices in industrial management and production. F.W. Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* was published in 1911, and in 1913 Henry Ford set up the world's first assembly-line production system in Dearborn, Michigan. By the fragmentation and reorganization of space, Harvey argues, Ford accelerated the process of production and therefore the turnover time of capital in production. Ford fragmented the process of manufacture into distinct tasks, all carried out simultaneously by the workforce on a constantly moving series of products. Such a procedure, in Harvey's view, parallels the emphasis on simultaneity in modernist culture, and particularly in the fragmentation of space in cubist painting. It could perhaps also be said that such a process is an especially effective means of obscuring from those involved in it the disparity between the value of their work and the payment they receive for it. As in cubist painting, then, the fragmentation of space serves to disrupt the conventional contexts in which value can be recognized and acknowledged.

[101] Sokel, *WE*, 8-9.

[102] Ibid. 8.

> is we who have to perceive phenomena in location and call this subjective necessity space. But space and time are neither given facts nor empirical concepts. They constitute themselves in our perception. But they are not objective absolutes, existing outside ourselves. The source of phenomena is forever unknowable. ... The *Critique of Pure Reason* unmasks the world as the product of our mind and declares the supernatural unknowable. With these two blows Kant shatters the foundation for art as mimesis and art as revelation. ... Absolute art, i.e., art as utterly free creation or pure design, became theoretically conceivable after Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.[103]

The implications of this for the artist were worked out in the *Critique of Judgement*. Kant's aesthetic theory was built on the insight that the artist has an "arbitrary freedom to create according to his intentions".[104] Sokel describes this freedom as "absolute sovereignty". The artist chooses the form of his or her art. It is not bound to any non-artistic reality, but nor is art therefore abandoned to a formless chaos.[105] The cosmos which is undermined by the *Critique of Pure Reason* can be replaced by the quasi-divine creation of the artist:

> The artist is more than a discoverer of symbols and even a prophet of truth—he is the creator and legislator of a universe; and this universe of art is the only one in which man is completely free of the yoke of empirical necessity and the categorical imperative of the moral law. Thus art assumed a far greater importance than it had possessed in earlier aesthetics. Both art as mimesis and art as revelation had been subservient to other realities, physical or spiritual, means to an end; for Kant art became an end in itself. And since it was the only realm in which man could be free it also became man's salvation. In art man became God, not by discovering or revealing Him, but by creating as a god creates.[106]

From this notion of the sovereign creativity of artistic genius, Kant worked out an aesthetic theory which stressed the sharp distinction between aesthetic ideas and logic, and also the organic nature of art. The organic conception of art, Sokel notes, was the common property of Idealism, developed also in the thought of Herder and Goethe and applied rigorously by Schiller. Its essence is the notion that meaning in art is not a matter of content - e.g. the theme or subject of the work of art - but a matter of the organic or functional relation of its various parts. Organic art, then, is art in

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103 Sokel, *WE*, 9.

104 Quoted ibid. 9.

105 Although as Sokel notes elsewhere formless chaos has sometimes been very evident in German artistic life, not least in Expressionism.

106 Ibid. 10.

which the idea of the work is to be found in its form. Sokel quotes Schiller's extraordinary affirmation that "the art-secret of the master" is "that by the form he abolishes the content".[107] The resemblance between this idea and the abstraction of Kandinsky and other modernists is obvious. It indicates the extent to which modernism had roots in German Idealism; yet it also indicates a paradox, that the idea of absolute form should originate in Idealism, which was a conscious reaction against the rationalizing Enlightenment emphasis on form. As Sokel notes, both formalist abstraction and the rebellion against form are products of the rejection of mimesis. Both of them "lack the full-bodied three-dimensional impression of life at which realistic art aims".[108] He suggests that the roots of this are to be found in the social situation of the German intellectual and artist: compared to the polite societies developed in other European nations during the eighteenth century, Germany was backward. Intellectuals, and writers in particular, were not integrated into the established social order. Their attitude to it therefore tended to be sceptical and critical. One result of this is the recurrence in German literature of the idea of youthful rebellion against established social constraint. The point Sokel makes, though, is that both formlessness and absolute form, (i.e. vitalism and abstraction) are attempts to deal with the artist's alienation.[109]

A question arises here, though, as to whether Sokel's emphasis on the social situation of German artists implies a radical limitation of the connection, which I have already sought to defend, between artistic techniques and ideas. If modernist techniques were a product of the particular social situation of artists, isn't modernism of negligible relevance to everyone except artists? Wouldn't this place severe limits on the range of ideas and experiences that are relevant to modernism? I would suggest that this need not be so. For one thing, the situation of Enlightenment writers and

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107 See Sokel, *WE*, 13.

108 Ibid. 13.

109 A fuller account of the circumstance s Sokel refers to can be found in W. H. Bruford's *Germany in the Eighteenth Century: The Social Background of the Literary Revival*, op. cit., and in particular Part IV Chapter II, 'The Influence of Political, Economic and Social Factors on Literature'. Bruford makes clearer than Sokel the connection between the experience of writers and more general social and cultural changes. See also Henri Brunschwig *Enlightenment and Romanticism in Eighteenth Century Prussia* trans. F. Jellinek, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1974), especially pp. 150-163.

intellectuals reflected broader changes in society.[110] The rise of modern science, the progress of capitalism, the development of political absolutism, the plurality of religious confessions in the German territiories following the Thirty Years War: all these contributed to a sense of the disenchantment of the world, which placed the connection between the world and the human subject in question. The social alienation of German writers and intellectuals amounted to an intensification of this more general situation. To this extent, moreover, the circumstances and experience of these writers prefigured the subsequent course of modern societies. The estrangement from society felt by Enlightenment and Romantic intellectuals was therefore the forerunner of the dissatisfaction with bourgeois convention that permeated the Expressionist generation.[111]

Sokel makes an important point, then, when he draws attention to the resemblance between the world as described in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the results of economic modernization: "Technology has made our world conform ever more closely to Kant's philosophy in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: each day the world resembles a little more a construct created by our mind in a chaos of meaningless phenomena."[112] The message of Kant - mediated by technological and economic modernization - was taken seriously by modernism. The sovereign creativity of the artist mirrors the apparently sovereign creativity of technology. This results in a radical shift from thinking in terms of stable substantial reality to thinking in terms of function:

> Even as content gives way to form, the concept of 'being' yields to the concept of 'functioning'. ... Substance is transferred into process and function; the noun bows to the verb; content becomes method; active

110 See note 109 above.

111 Sokel makes these points himself, when he notes that Georg Kaiser's *Der gerettete Alkibiades* (Alcibiades Saved) of 1920 "symbolises in a subtle and ingenious way the cultural situation of Europe and the intellectual's role in it" (p. 109).

112 Ibid. 117.

expression replaces passive *experience*.[113]

What results from this, though, is a conflict between the different impulses inherent in modernism. On the one hand there are these apprehensions of a crisis of representation, the sense that knowledge and language are not rooted in a stable, substantial reality, but are contingent constructions arising in social life. While the new emphases on expression and function, rooted in the constructive human spirit, can be and were understood as a dramatic advance over earlier culture, they can equally be interpreted as a loss. Gottfried Benn, perhaps the most enduringly and persistently modernist writer among the Expressionists, described the notion of the constructive human spirit as something superior to life, and therefore capable of a transcendence of nihilism.[114] Behind this modernism lurks nihilism; behind its sense of superiority lies alienation. The 'desubstantivation of the world' that Werfel had demanded in 1917 reflects a desire to rise above the level of 'natural life' in disembodied creativity. But as the failure of the activist-Expressionist *Wandlung* to transform the world made plain, it provides no new grounding for the social order in the midst of the flux and ephemerality of modernity. Modernism, as noted earlier, is haunted by the sense that its apprehensions constitute a defeat, a "renunciation of the attempt to give order to things, a despair of history".[115] This modernism, then, results in a second, conflicting impulse: the impulse to regain a connection with objective reality, with a given order and meaning; the impulse, in short to overcome estrangement from society, a

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[113] See *WE*, 116. Sokel is describing the work of Gottfried Benn, who was more consistent in the application of these ideas than any other Expressionist. It is interesting that Sokel goes on to provide two more examples of the relation between these ideas and other developments in intellectual life. He notes first a parallel with the new physics: "The transformation of the ancient concept of substance into the modern concept of function is probably the single most important philosophical revolution wrought by modern physics in which matter is defined as energy." Secondly he notes a parallel with modern psychology, in which behaviour takes the place of the psyche as the object of study. I would draw attention to the fact that David Harvey places great emphasis on this very same shift, but he describes it in slightly different terms, as a conflict between the privileging of space over time and the privileging of time over space. He notes (p. 205) that aesthetic theory tends towards the former, because representation is a 'spatialization of time'. Social theory however tends the opposite way: rapid social change undermines a sense of fixed space and accelerates the sense of the passing of time. Harvey therefore tends to emphasize those elements in modernist art which seem to attempt to represent the flow of time.

[114] See ibid. 115.

[115] Butler, *EM*, 175.

longing for integration into a social order. It is a longing for a cosmos, a restless desire for a context in which sense and meaning are intrinsically present.

The late history of Expressionism can, as Sokel has shown, be interpreted in terms of the dialectic of these opposing impulses. Few writers were able to sustain a modernist approach much beyond the start of the new decade in 1920. Gottfried Benn stands almost alone as one who maintained an experimental approach; even this, though, did not prevent him from an enthusiastic declaration of support for Nazism in the the early 1930s.[116] Those Expressionists who attempted to maintain the form and message of their early work mostly appeared anachronistic, and failed to achieve any lasting artistic success. In the fifteen years prior to his suicide in 1939, Ernst Toller achieved little of any critical note or popular success. Unruh, Sokel says, "experienced premature decline from work to work".[117] He continued to try to combine activist moralism with Expressionist form, but the works he produced went unrecognized. They were no longer, Sokel suggests,

116 Hugh Ridley's paper *Irrationalism, Art and Violence: Ernst Jünger and Gottfried Benn* (in Bance op. cit. 26-37) provides useful comment on the ways in which Benn's approval of Nazism was a new development, but nonetheless a development, of his views during the Weimar period. Sokel (p. 229f.) has valuable comment on the complex relation between Expressionism and totalitarian movements. Expressionism was one of the main targets of the Nazis' denouncement of degenerate art; yet, as Sokel says, the "confluence of late Expressionism and Nazism was neither a chance happening nor a reversal of the Expressionist current but a natural denouement of basic Expressionist tendencies". Other writers, though, moved towards Communism and populist commercialism, and were equally able to see their development as true to Expressionism.

117 Sokel, *WE*, 231.

viable works of art.[118]

The majority of Expressionists, on the other hand, found modernism unsustainable, and sought to overcome alienation by giving precedence to the impulse towards *Sachlichkeit*. They diverted their hopes towards existing religious or national communities - Johst's Nazism and Becher's Communism have already been mentioned. Another important example of this trend is Franz Werfel's critique of Expressionism and accommodation with commercialism. The works in which this turn became clear were his *Spiegelmensch* trilogy of 1920 and his *Verdi* of 1923. In *Spiegelmensch* Werfel exposes and condemns the self-deification present in Expressionism, in its ethical idealism as well as its vitalism. The background to the action is provided by a narrative of the three stages or 'visions' of human life, told to the hero of the story, Thamal, by the abbot of the monastery in which he has sought refuge. Sokel summarizes: "In the first vision men think they see the world while they see only themselves. In the second vision they know that they see only themselves and realize the prison in which egotism keeps them shut off from reality."[119] This second vision, then, involves a struggle with the "mirror man", the personification of reflected self love. If this struggle is won then one's mirror will change into a window, allowing light

[118] It should be noted that painting and other areas of cultural production did not follow quite the same path as writing and drama. The demise of Expressionism as a powerful force did not mean that modernism died out, even in Germany. On the contrary the decade of the twenties was the period of 'heroic modernism', to borrow David Harvey's term. Kandinsky's painting is a good example: his drive to abstraction was maintained throughout the Weimar years and in his late work, after he left Germany in 1933. However his work did display significant development in its style and technique. As Harvey notes, (p. 280f.) his early, Expressionist works convey a strong sense of movement and excitement. They display "such an explosive sense of space that they appear to spill off the canvas with an uncontrollable dynamism" (p. 281). After the War Kandinsky began to paint in a way that suggests stillness and calm, a more studied and rational organization of the canvas. Harvey calls these "controlled pictures of spaces neatly organized within a secure frame, in some cases clearly taking the form of diagrammed city plans viewed from a perspective high above the earth" (p. 280). Even in abstract art there was in a sense a move toward *Sachlichkeit!* The modernism of the Bauhaus (at which Kandinsky taught throughout the twenties) represented a new attempt of the constructive human spirit to impose order, reconciled with technology and mechanization, and thereby to resist the nationalistic mythologies which grew up in the aftermath of the War. The Bauhaus was eventually closed down by the Nazis. Unfortunately the constructive spirit of heroic modernism proved well suited to the aims of totalitarianism. Just as Gottfried Benn sensed an analogy between the Nazi state and the constructivism of modernism, the architecture of modernism was easily taken over by totalitarian regimes. See Harvey, op. cit. 282.

[119] Sokel, *WE*, 213.

in and making one ready to love. The third stage, which is not achievable for mortals, is the stage of the saviour, the Christ, who sees the world and redeems it, at the same time redeeming God - for the world is God's mirror, the scene of his struggle with his image, humanity.

The story follows the career of Thamal who mistakenly thinks he has attained sight of a genuine reality. He passes through vitalism and activism, his self-deception illustrating the delusion at the heart of Expressionism, its "blasphemous deification of man". With hindsight, Werfel presents this as "the archsin of Expressionism and the cause of its ruin". Like other works involved in the recoil against activist Expressionism, *Spiegelmensch* envisages an ideal of a life integrated into a normal human community. It is distinguished, though, by the fact that this ideal is not treated as a remote and revolutionary (even eschatological) goal. On the contrary Werfel sees such a normality as grounded in the past, in the continuity of succeeding generations.

Werfel's *Verdi* is an even more direct critique of modernism, contrasting it with art which is directed towards the end of satisfying actual human needs. The novel works this out by drawing a contrast between Verdi and Wagner. Wagner's art is taken in the novel to be the result of idealist/modernist rootlessness. Its desire for unrestricted expression is indicative of neurosis and megalomania. Its indifference to its reception by an audience is not humility but arrogance, "vanity thwarted and turned inward".[120] Its creativity is at the same time destruction. Verdi, by contrast does not share the modernists' desire to challenge and shatter musical conventions. Verdi represents a tradition in which the alienation of art from life has not taken place. Art is therefore not a matter of absolute form, of organic development which follows some supposed inner law, but of the needs and desires of its audience.[121] The recoil, says Sokel, has gone as far as it can go:

> Werfel's novel shows the artist's integration in the community, the dream

[120] Sokel, *WE*, 224.

[121] As Sokel notes, a distinction must be drawn between the characters in Werfel's novel and the careers of the composers themselves. In particular, he notes that Verdi's music moved with time towards greater sophistication and complexity. Werfel's Verdi, by contrast, moved towards greater and greater simplicity.

> that had motivated activist Expressionism from its beginning, not as a utopian goal attainable only through a revolutionary upheaval and the regeneration of mankind, but as a commonplace reality.[122]

But this commonplace reality cannot be produced by "spectacular personal regeneration" or, for that matter, "collective revolution". Werfel's later work, notably his *Song of Bernadette,* complied with the ideas expounded in *Verdi*: written in a simple and conventional style, it achieved great popular success.

vi. Franz Kafka: Judaism, alienation and integration.

Franz Kafka is one writer whose work points to a more sustained dialectic between the dual impulses inherent in Expressionism. He was not, perhaps, an entirely typical Expressionist; yet his writings provide us with paradigmatic instances of the concerns already discussed. To conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of Kafka, therefore, will help to give further emphasis to these essential concerns; it will moreover, draw attention to the alternative possibility which Kafka points to, in which neither of the opposing impulses of Expressionism triumphs at the expense of the other.

First of all, Kafka's work was deeply concerned with the problem of the writer's estrangement from society, and with the alienating effects of modern society generally. An important context for his concern with these issues is his family background. A German-speaking Jew, Kafka was brought up in Prague, a city in which the vast majority both ethnically and linguistically were Czech. In regard to both Jewish ethnicity and his German language, Kafka was a member of estranged minorities. Yet there was another aspect to the alienation of Kafka and his contemporaries: they felt themselves to be cut off also from their Jewish identity. Assimilation was the goal of Jews like Kafka's parents; their adherence to Jewish traditions was largely nominal; it appeared to Kafka to be a meaningless attachment to antiquated customs.[123] The rootless, estranged situation of the West-

122 Sokel, *WE*, 225.

123 See Robertson, *Kafka*, 6: "Kafka came to feel that his parents' residual Judaism had been drained of its religious content and was merely part of the complex of Jewish middle-class values to which they adhered unquestioningly."

European Jew came, understandably, to be a major concern of Kafka's writing. But to this extent his experience and concern were closely related to modernism. By virtue of the condition of diaspora, as David Harvey notes, Jews were "the ethnic and religious group most representative of internationalism".[124] As a minority, often discriminated against and perceived as outsiders, Jews had plenty of experience of the alienation from the social order which, paradoxically, was coming to be the common experience of the ethnic and religious majority too. As a member of this minority, Kafka's situation was typical of "the marginal position of the intellectual in modern Western society".[125]

Yet there was inevitably another side to the Jewish experience. The process of assimilation raised a question about the continuing nature of Jewish identity. To be a West-European Jew was not only to have extreme exposure to the experiences that defined the modern self; it was, equally, to be aware of a different identity, an identity rooted in a particular ethnic group with its distinct religious tradition. It was this conflict between the modern self and an identity rooted in tradition that was decisive for Kafka's writing. The immediate stimulus to his awareness of his own Jewish identity came from his encounters with East European Jews in 1911-12, in the form of a Yiddish theatre company from Galicia. The important thing about this experience was that it showed Kafka for the first time a genuinely living tradition of Jewish culture and life. The experience of Jewishness in Prague conveyed primarily one's marginal position; the experience of Galician Yiddish theatre conveyed a living and unselfconscious Jewish culture. Kafka's contact with the Yiddish theatre, Robertson notes "gave him a burning desire to find out all he could about Jewish history and culture".[126] As Robertson also points out, this contact provoked Kafka's thoughts about minor literature, recorded in his diary on 25th December 1911. In these notes, Kafka envisaged "a society in which literature was intimately connected with popular and

124 Harvey, op. cit. 277.

125 Robertson, *Kafka*, 7. It is also worth noting that Kafka's employment in the state insurance Institute concerned with compensation for industrial accidents gave him a good appreciation of the nature of industrial work and its dehumanizing effects, as well as its physical dangers. This awareness appeared in his writing, particularly in *Der Verschollene*. *Der Prozeß* and *Die Verwandlung* also record the dehumanizing effects of work in bureaucratic and commercial organizations. See ibid. 50f.

126 Ibid. 17.

political life and had a central place in peoples' interest."[127] Such a literature "would permeate the life of the society, especially its political life, without sacrificing its artistic integrity. The problem of the artist's position in society would thus be overcome."[128]

Kafka's encounter with the world of the Galician Jews prompts him, then, to envisage a society, and a literature, in which the alienation of modernity had been overcome, or, perhaps, had never taken place. Yet he himself was not a Galician Yiddish speaker. He was a German speaker with a Western education. There was no easy symbiosis between his artistic efforts and the society in which he lived. This was reflected painfully in his own home, in which literature had a marginal status, and where "his parents regarded his writing and his reading with uncomprehending disapproval".[129] An excellent summary of the situation of Kafka and his friends is contained in a letter he wrote to Max Brod in 1921: "Most young Jews who began to write German wanted to leave Jewishness behind them, and their fathers approved of this ... But with their posterior legs they were still glued to their father's Jewishness and with their waving anterior legs they found no new ground. The ensuing despair became their inspiration."[130] Kafka's vision of the artist's integration into the community was an ideal which he had no means of realizing. To summarize, what is plain in all this is that Kafka's circumstances and experience presented him particularly forcefully with the dual impulses which shaped Expressionism - expression of estrangement, and desire for integration in community.

This tension between alienation and integration was to be decisive for Kafka's writing. Robertson argues that *Das Urteil*, his "first major work of fiction",[131] is an answer to the problem of "the *Judenfrage*, the problem of the position of Jews in Western society".[132] In the encounter and conflict between Georg Bendemann and his father, there is a mirror of the conflict

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127 Robertson, *Kafka*, 24.
128 Ibid. 25.
129 Ibid. 25.
130 See *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors* ed. M. Brod, English translation by. R. and C. Winston, (Schocken Books, New York, 1977), 289.
131 Robertson, *Kafka*, 28.
132 Ibid. 30.

between the secular world to which Western Jews had become assimilated, and the Jewish past. What gives the story its peculiar force, though, is the fact that the encounter has the character of a confrontation between absolute justice and absolute guilt. Georg's guilt is absolute but is buried so deeply in his being that it is hidden, undetectable by introspection, and unable to made explicit in the story. He lives in a world estranged from absolute justice; and when that justice is suddenly encountered, when its cover is momentarily thrown off, condemnation and death are the unavoidable consequences. The position of assimilated Jews like Georg (and by implication all those assimilated into the modern industrial world) is untenable. They are alienated from the truth of their existence; yet if they could confront that truth they would find themselves absolutely condemned.

It is this sense of complete alienation from absolute justice that marks much of Kafka's writing. The key is in the statement of the officer in *In der Strafkolonie*: "guilt is always beyond question."[133] Robertson refers to this as the estrangement of consciousness from being.[134] As a result of this estrangement, "no amount of self-exploration can reach the bedrock, the fundamental being, that underlies consciousness". The self "always retreats before attempts to define it. No matter where the observer places himself, the self stays just beyond the horizon of consciousness."[135] It is worth noting how Kantian this quality is. The estrangement of consciousness from being clearly reflects the Kantian split between the phenomenal and the noumenal. Another thing worth noting is that Robertson's talk of our consciousness being estranged from "the bedrock, the true being, that underlies our consciousness" is potentially misleading. Such talk of a bedrock suggests something solid and secure, something capable of underlying consciousness. Yet the truth which we are estranged from, in Kafka's story, is not a secure self, but an absolute justice that condemns us. The truth of our existence, in Kafka's early fiction, is our absolute guilt, our negation. If anything is stable and secure it is only our absolute condemnation.

133 See 'In the Penal Colony' in *The Transformation and Other Stories*, 132.
134 See Robertson, *Kafka*, 33 and 80, and also 185-217 generally.
135 Ibid. 80.

There is a sense, too, in this writing that the absolute justice which condemns us is genuinely transcendent: it can no more be adequately represented in the world than the absolute guilt it implies can be discovered by introspection. In so far as the transcendent realm is able to be represented in human life, it seems to be in strangely imperfect forms. Robertson puts this well, pointing out that on several occasions, "a transcendent reality is manifested in shabby and repellent guise".[136] The first of these occasion, he suggests, is the 'Teater von Oklahama' episode in *Der Verschollene*, which he interprets as ironic; yet even in *Das Urteil*, written some two years earlier, shabbiness and repulsiveness are not wholly absent from Georg's father, who has the responsibility of pronouncing the judgement on his son.[137]

An important change in Kafka's thought occurred in the winter of 1917-18. Robertson relates it to Kafka's realization, recorded in his correspondence and diary, that his tendency to self-incrimination was actually a form of vanity. In the light of this admission, Kafka's earlier stories which focus on guilt as the truth of our existence appear as exercises in self-condemnation and therefore disguised pride. His writing from this point onward focuses much less on the sense that to encounter transcendence is to encounter our own absolute guilt. The first fruit of this is in the aphorisms which he wrote in Zürau during that winter. The ideas that came to the fore in his earlier work are still present. There is still, for example, a conviction that the truth

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136 Robertson, Kafka, 61.

137 Another way of putting this would be to note, as R. Hinton Thomas does, that Kafka presents an extreme form of the dualism between finite and infinite that marked the whole of Expressionism. See Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 23-4, where he says: "The duality which we find inherent in the theoretical formulation of Expressionist doctrines by Kornfeld and which recurs so persistently in Expressionist writers, the contrast namely of the Finite and the Infinite or, in Worringer's words, the antithesis of 'Transcendence' and 'Immanence,' gives to Expressionist art a special task; it must resolve this implicit duality. If Man is to become, as Kornfeld demands he shall become, in true contact with the Divine, he must establish a link with the Infinite; he must become 'der Beseelte.' He must, however, fulfil his infinite obligations within the framework of the Finite. ... If, therefore, the Expressionist artist is to satisfy both imperatives he must discover a method of uniting the opposing claims." Thomas acknowledges that in Kafka, more than any other writer, this antithesis is present. In fact Kafka is from this point of view the exemplary Expressionist: "By no other writer of the Movement is the irreconcilable dualism of the Finite and the Infinite, of Time and Eternity, given such significant expression." ibid. 140. See also 'Franz Kafka and the Religious Aspect of Expressionism' by R.H. Thomas in *German Life and Letters* vol II, (1937-8), 42-49. It might actually be better to say not that Kafka was the exemplary Expressionist but that he went well beyond Expressionism in the seriousness with which he took this dialectic.

of our existence transcends us.[138] There is still a sense of absolute judgement,[139] and a concentration on the nature of good and evil. Yet there is also a sense that human life is grounded in truth, as well as judged by it. The notion of 'the Indestructible' (*das Unzerstörbare*) as the basis of human life is important for this development. He wrote "The Indestructible is one: it is each individual human being and at the same time it is common to all, hence the unparalleled strength of the bonds that unite mankind."[140]

The most substantial fruit of this new approach was *Das Schloß*, written in 1922. As Robertson notes, it reaffirms "the idea of a frontier that consciousness cannot cross. If the Castle corresponds to the indestructible basis of human life, then K.'s efforts to penetrate the Castle and apprehend 'das Unzerstörbare' intellectually are as futile as the attempt to jump over one's own shadow would be".[141] Yet there is something very different in the book from Kafka's earlier stories. In *Der Prozeß* the Court, which had symbolized transcendence, had been the absolute condemnation of human life. Now transcendence is symbolized by the Castle which, though just as unattainable as the higher reaches of the Court, is nonetheless the basis of the village's life. To be alienated from truth is not to be debarred from a fruitful life. It is therefore possible to live in accordance with the truth of life even if one cannot apprehend it. K., in *Das Schloß*, may not be able to enter the Castle but he is nonetheless able to live in the village. This is something he realized early in the novel, though he did not heed it. The occasion was his observation that the letter from Klamm recognizing his appointment as land-surveyor offered him a choice: he could either become one of the village workers, hoping to achieve something in the Castle by working in the village; or he could depend on his connection to the Castle and hope to achieve something through that connection directly. His response is instant:

> K. did not hesitate in his choice, and would not have hesitated even had he lacked the experience which had befallen him since his arrival. Only as a worker in the village, removed as far as possible from the sphere of the

138 See for example "Truth is indivisible, hence it cannot recognize itself; whoever wants to recognize it must be a lie." *The Great Wall of China*, 92.

139 See for example "It is only our conception of time that makes us call the Last Judgement by that name; in fact it is a permanent court-martial." ibid. 85.

140 Ibid. 90.

141 Robertson, *Kafka*, 275-6.

> Castle, could he hope to achieve anything in the Castle itself; ... then all kinds of paths would be thrown open to him, which would remain not only for ever closed to him but quite invisible were he to depend merely on the favour of the gentlemen in the Castle.[142]

The rest of the book, however, records K.'s attempts to proceed on the basis of the Castle's favour. When he is presented with opportunities to become more integrated into the village's life he spurns them because of his desire to make contact with the Castle.

Kafka's irony is to the fore again in his last stories, notably in "Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse", written in March 1924 and published immediately.[143] As Robertson notes, it constitutes Kafka's last statement about the artist's place in the community, substituting self-effacement for his earlier self-torment. Josefine, the mouse-songstress, does nothing but squeak, in a manner indistinguishable from ordinary squeaking except for its feebleness. Her vanity is incorrigible; yet she is listened to, not because she is a real artist but because she is one of the mouse-people. Therefore "It is not Josefine's performance but the act of listening to it that matters. The mice who gather to hear it feel that they form a 'Volksversammlung'."[144] The song at such a gathering of the people is neither an aesthetic achievement nor a revelation of truth. It is, instead, like a speaking arising from the situation of the people as a whole and addressing each one:

> This piping which rises up, when all others are enjoined to silence, comes almost as a message from the people to each individual; the thin piping of Josefine in the midst of grave decisions is almost like the pitiful existence of our people amid the tumult of the hostile world.[145]

The mouse people, as Robertson makes clear, are like the West-European

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142 *The Castle*, 29-30. Note also Max Brod's editor's note to the first edition, describing the ending which Kafka had apparently planned for the book: "The ostensible Land Surveyor was to find partial satisfaction at least. He was not to relax in his struggle, but was to die worn out by it. Round his death-bed the villagers were to assemble, and from the Castle itself the word was to come that though K.'s legal claim to live in the village was not valid, yet, taking certain auxiliary circumstances into account, he was to be permitted to live and work there." ibid. 7.

143 It had to be published immediately to help pay for Kafka's medical care. It was in fact the last story he wrote; he died on 3rd June 1924. The story was published in a literary supplement to the *Prager Presse*'s Easter issue on 20th April 1924.

144 Robertson, *Kafka*, 280-1.

145 *The Transformation and Other Stories*, 227.

Jews. Josefine's role is not to call them out of the "tumult of the hostile world"; nor to bemoan their "pitiful existence" - for there is in her piping "something of a lost happiness that can never be found again, but it also has something of our busy life here and now, of that little admixture of unfathomable gaiety which persists and cannot be extinguished".[146] Rather she speaks to them out of their experience, and addresses that experience.

If Kafka's writing is distinguished from other Expressionists by its sense of the transcendence of truth, his late work is marked by its vision of an art that speaks from and to the life of the diaspora Jew, and indeed the modern world in general. To call this Kafka's solution would perhaps be too strong; but there is in the picture of the feeble squeaking of the mouse-songstress and in the inextinguishable gaiety of her people a dialectical resolution of their alienation.[147] The way Kafka suggested was neither an abandonment of his generation (something he felt Werfel had committed) nor was it an embrace of Zionism (like his friend Brod). It envisaged a people estranged from, yet grounded in the transcendent. They are unable to breach the heavens but they can still live, despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that they cannot. Kafka could mock the artist's situation with gentle irony: their value for the people was not what they thought it to be; but the attempt at art was still needed, and still had a value and a purpose.

146 *The Transformation and Other Stories*, 230.

147 See Robertson, *Kafka*, 283, where he talks of a dialectical resolution both inside and outside the story.

i. Karl Barth and modern art.

Unlike his close contemporary Paul Tillich, it is clear that Karl Barth had no special love for, or interest in, twentieth century art and literature in general and Expressionism in particular.[1] This does not mean, though, that he had no interest in culture whatsoever. It is simply that his tastes and interests seem to have been directed towards the middle ground rather than the avant-garde. There are plenty of illustrations of this in Barth's theological writings, for he was not slow to make connections between theology and those aspects of culture which did appeal to him. Most obvious, perhaps, is the fact that his writings are peppered with references to his beloved Mozart; notable also are references to Grünewald's depiction of the crucifixion from the Isenheim altarpiece.[2]

So far as literature is concerned, Barth's treatment of Lessing and Novalis in his lectures on the background to modern Protestant theology testifies to his interest in and knowledge of classical and romantic German literature. He had planned to conclude those lectures with a study of Goethe which would have emphasized this even more, but which was, unfortunately, never written.[3] Coming closer to the modern period, there are references in Barth's work which suggest reasonable familiarity with the work of writers and dramatists at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, such as Ibsen and Gerhart Hauptmann.[4] He was introduced to the

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1 Many of Tillich's writings on art, including Expressionism, have been published in Paul Tillich *On Art and Architecture* ed. J. & J. Dillenberger, (Crossroad, New York, 1989).

2 See for example Barth, *WGWM*, op. cit. 65-7 and 75-6. It is interesting to note that Grünewald was much admired by Expressionist artists. Note also Tillich's comment: "I believe that it [Grünewald's *Crucifixion*] is the greatest German picture ever painted, and it shows you that expressionism is by no means a modern invention." See Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, 99.

3 This is mentioned in the foreword written in 1946 for the publication of the lectures. See *PT*, op. cit. 11. This is supported by an as yet unpublished letter from Barth to Thurneysen, dated 23rd December 1932. Describing the course of lectures he has partly completed, he wrote: "Goethe, mit dem ich eigentlich gipfeln und schliessen wollte, werde ich vielleicht im Sommersemester an den Anfang nehmen mussen."

4 Barth includes Hauptmann's 1910 novel *Emanuel Quint* on his year-by-year list of events mentioned on p. 1 above. There are references to Ibsen in the Tambach lecture, see *WGWM*, 315, and in the second edition of *Romans*, op. cit. 232.

novels of Dostoevsky by Eduard Thurneysen while in Safenwil, and his interest in them seems to have been considerable. He is reported to have said that he could not have written either version of the commentary on *Romans* without his acquaintance of these novels.[5]

Having said all this, though, it ought to be stressed that Barth was by no means ignorant of modern art. In this regard I want to draw attention to the fact that he was fortunate enough to have had some personal contact with an artist closely involved in the development of Expressionist painting, and to that extent had an excellent opportunity to learn about its principles; nor does he seem to have spurned this opportunity. This contact came via Barth's brother-in-law Richard Kisling, who lived in Zürich. Kisling was, as Busch records, a "keen patron of the fine arts"; but more than this he owned a gallery and dealt in pictures. As one might expect of someone in his position, he was a personal friend of several artists.[6] Barth spent time in his house on several occasions, and got to know several of Kisling's circle of friends, in particular the painter Cuno Amiet and the sculptor Hermann Hubacher. Barth mentions having spent time at the Kislings' house in his correspondence to Thurneysen as early as 25th September 1914.[7] In a letter of 20th January 1915 he mentions being at Kisling's gallery in connection

[5] See *How I changed my Mind* ed. J.D. Godsey, (John Knox Press, Richmond VA., 1966), 21. German translations of Dostoevsky became available only in the early part of this century. Dostoevsky also was a significant influence on Expressionism.

[6] See Busch, *Karl Barth*, op. cit. 101. Kisling was married to Hedwig Hoffmann, the sister of Barth's wife Nelly. Reference to his gallery is made in Barth's letter to Thurneysen of 20th January 1915, see *B-Th Br. I.* 26, also ibid. 14.

[7] See *B-Th Br. I.* 11-14.

with a family wedding.[8] On 14th June that year he mentions that he is about to go to Zürich to baptise a child of the Kislings.

Richard Kisling died prematurely on 7th March 1917, but Barth's contacts with his circle of friends did not cease; in fact only after this date are Hubacher and Amiet mentioned in Barth's correspondence. The first of these references is in a letter of 26th May 1917, in which Barth mentions that Amiet has been shown one of Barth's sermons "Über die Grenze" ("Across the Border"). Barth spent a month in Zürich with his sister-in-law after Easter 1918, while working on the first *Romans*. Amiet and Hubacher were staying there also, and Barth seems to have enjoyed the contact with them. In a letter to Thurneysen of 24th April he says: "Very pleasing to me is the contact with the painter Amiet and the sculptor Hubacher, who are also staying with my sister-in-law, and with whom I have quickly been able to reach an understanding."[9] A month later, Barth mentions a trip he has taken with his confirmation candidates which ended with them meeting Amiet.[10] The next reference is somewhat later, in a letter of 3rd December 1919, in which Barth mentions Hubacher in passing.[11] The only other substantial reference is in a letter of 20th June 1921, in which Barth describes having been in Zürich to baptise three nieces. Present among the company were

[8] He describes having to speak while standing in front of a picture of the Battle of Marignano painted by Ferdinand Hodler. Hodler, though older than the Expressionists, was an important figure in Swiss and German art around the turn of the century. He developed techniques which were influential on the younger generation; he was regarded by some Expressionists as having an influence on them ranking with van Gogh, Matisse, Gauguin and Klimt. See Peter Selz *German Expressionist Painting* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), 113. As will be noted shortly his influence on the Brücke group was transmitted partly via Cuno Amiet. Dube op. cit. 77 also records Hodler's favourable impression on the young Emil Nolde during the 1890's. Nolde was later a member of the Brücke. Hodler's influence extended even to writers: Samuel and Thomas note (p. 113) that he was important for the worker-poet Gerritt Engelke. Barth recounts the day in question as follows: "Scene: the picture-gallery of my brother-in-law Kisling. I stand among trees under a violent, bloody part of Hodler's picture of Marignano, a Swiss Guard taking a swing at my head the whole time!" (*B-Th Br. I.* 26.) This occasion on its own does not amount to a wide exposure to modern art; it does however give a good indication of Kisling's interest in and contact with some of the most important contemporary art.

[9] *B-Th Br. I.* 274.

[10] Ibid. 279.

[11] Ibid. 356.

Hubacher and also the writer Hermann Hesse.[12]

It is Barth's contact with Amiet that is interesting in all this, since the latter had important connections with the development of German Expressionist painting. He joined the Brücke group in 1906 by invitation, one of the first two to be added to its original membership; he exhibited with them from this point on, right until the group's dissolution in May 1913.[13] Peter Selz suggests that Amiet, who was a little older than the other Brücke artists, was not greatly influenced by them. However: "His [Amiet's] influence on the development of the Brücke ... must have been considerable: Amiet brought them the direct message of Gauguin, of Hodler, and of his own work in Fauve-like colour."[14] He also quotes a retrospective comment by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (one of the founders of the Brücke), acknowledging that Amiet had been "ahead of us with his large planes of colour".[15] Selz sums up Amiet's importance for the development of the Brücke by saying that he "was able to help the Brücke evolve from a provincial group of German

[12] Barth records his impressions of the latter: "The conversation with Hesse took place beforehand. I was again amazed by the pietistic narrowness with which these artists are apparently mostly concerned with the problem of their private existence. '*I* work the matter out, in order to find *my* way out of the sizeable difficulties of life...'; that is the tenor of all their arguments. ... in short, the man was nothing to write home about, and a little didactic. Hubacher is, without 'world-view', much more reasonable." ibid. 497. Barth's view of Hesse, and indeed of artists in general, is clearly not very positive. Note that Busch comments (*Karl Barth* p. 125) that this baptism ceremony took place in Richard Kisling's home. This is at very least misleading, since Richard Kisling himself had died more than four years earlier.

[13] Note an error by Selz who says, at p. 96, that Amiet's participation was limited to the contribution of one work to their exhibition in 1907. This is incorrect. Selz in fact contradicts himself, for he notes on p.116 that Amiet exhibited with the Brücke in Dresden in 1910. For fuller information on Amiet's contributions to the Brücke exhibitions see Georg Reinhardt *Die frühe 'Brücke': Beiträge zur Geschichte und zum Werk der Dresdner Künstlergruppe 'Brücke' der Jahre 1905 bis 1908* (Brücke-Museum, Berlin, 1977/78), 192-4. Reinhardt makes clear that Amiet's work appeared in most of the Brücke exhibitions, from 1906 until January 1913 (in Basel). Note also that Reinhardt provides a useful bibliography on Amiet at p. 200. Note also a potentially misleading comment in Busch, *Karl Barth*, p. 125. His reference to the Brücke is ambiguous, but could be taken to suggest that both Hubacher and Amiet were members. Hubacher never was, though. He appears not to have had any links with Expressionism, in fact. His style has been described as "realistic academicism". See Michel Seuphor *The Sculpture of this Century: Dictionary of Modern Sculpture* (A. Zwemmer, London, 1959), 169.

[14] Selz, op. cit. 96.

[15] Ibid. 97. Schmidt-Rottluff corresponded for some time with Amiet, as did Erich Heckel. Some of this correspondence is held in the Archive of the Brücke-Museum in Berlin.

artists to a movement of European importance."[16] It is extremely interesting that Barth, at a time when he was working on the first *Romans*, spent a month in the same house as an artist who had had such close involvement with the development of Expressionist painting, conversing with him and apparently coming quickly to an understanding. It would be unwise to make too much of this, in the absence of further information about the conversations and the understanding reached. However the fact of this contact is important, and is useful background for the rest of this chapter.

These references in Barth's correspondence also illustrate the fact that Switzerland was no cultural desert during the War. On the contrary it experienced an extraordinary enrichment of its cultural life due to an influx of artists and writers who, usually through opposition to the War, chose to make their home outwith their native Germany. The destination of many of these was Zürich. Paul Raabe's *The Era of German Expressionism* contains several vivid accounts of Zürich during the War.[17] The following passage, from the recollections of Hans Arp, gives a good idea of their content:

> Despite the war those days were full of unusual charm and in retrospect they seem almost idyllic to me. At the time Zurich was occupied by an army of international revolutionaries, reformers, poets, painters, politicians and apostles of peace. They tended to meet in the Café Odeon. There every table was the extra- terrestrial possession of some group or other. The Dadaists took up two corners by the window. Opposite them sat the writers Wedekind, Leonhard Frank, Werfel, Ehrenstein and their friends. In the neighbourhood of those tables the dancer couple Sacharoff held court in precious attitudes and with them the two painters Baroness Werefkin and Jawlensky. A jumble of other people jostle about in my memory ... Joyce, the Irish writer, Busoni and my countryman from Alsace René Schickele, preferred to direct the fates of the world over a bottle of champagne in the Kronenhalle. ... Not far from the Cabaret Voltaire in which Dada first saw the light of day Comrade Lenin lived a few houses farther down the Spiegelgasse.[18]

As well as giving a general indication of the situation in Zürich during these years, the above passage indicates one distinctive and significant movement which emerged at this time in Switzerland: Zürich was the birthplace of

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[16] Selz, op. cit. 97. It is worth noting that Amiet's involvement with German Expressionism was not exhausted by his membership of the Brücke. He was also a member of the Berlin Secession, and, like the other Brücke artists, the Neue Sezession which split from it in 1910.
[17] See Raabe, *EGE*, 152-179.
[18] Ibid. 178.

Dadaism. Established by Hugo Ball in 1916, the Cabaret Voltaire was the original venue of this famous cultural protest, an "ironic and contemptuous response to a culture which had shown itself worthy of flame-throwers and machine-guns".[19] For all its neutrality, Switzerland during the War was no sleepy backwater in cultural terms.

ii. Expressionism in the Tambach Lecture.

In the light of all the above it is interesting that Barth's early theological work contains one explicit reference to Expressionism, in his famous lecture to a Religious Socialist conference in Tambach in Thuringia on 25th September 1919.[20] This reference makes clear that Barth knew enough about Expressionism to be able to make some interpretation of it in a theological context. The lecture itself made a great impact on its immediate audience and was the work which began to establish Barth's reputation in Germany. It s argument moved from a recognition of the gulf glossed over in the title Barth had been given ("The Christian's place — in society! How these two magnitudes fall apart! How abstract they are to each other!"), to a recognition that only as the action of God can there exist a real relation of the distinct magnitudes ("The synthesis we seek is in *God* alone, and in God alone can we find it."[21]) Yet the lecture also shows Barth's appreciation of the situation in post-war Germany, picking up the pessimism prevalent in the post-war period (*Nachkriegszeit*). Before talking of the world of God he talks of the scepticism about the social and political world which has resulted from the course of recent history. Family life, the economic order, art, science, politics, international relations, all go about their business according to their own laws; but it can now be seen more clearly than before that they are all on the wrong course:

> The catastrophe from which we are emerging but are not yet free has brought this fact for many, though not for all, into devastating clearness. If we had our wish would we not turn away from life and society in utter

[19] Raabe, *EGE*, 170. The comments are by Richard Huelsenbeck, an early contributor to and participant in the performances. A useful brief description of the Cabaret Voltaire is given in Huelsenbeck's *Die dadaistische Bewegung*, quoted at length in Raabe, *EGE*, pp. 340-1.

[20] "Der Christ in der Gesellschaft", published in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, 33-69. ET: "The Christian's Place in Society" in *WGWM*, 272-327.

[21] Barth, *WGWM*, 275 and 322 respectively.

scepticism and discouragement?[22]

The negative view of the social and political realm evident in the first *Romans* has clearly not gone away. Nor has Barth's negative judgement on the Religious Socialist attempt to reform this fallen realm. Indeed this lecture has been described as Barth's farewell to Religious Socialism.[23] Barth criticized what he saw as an emerging trend in the Protestant Churches - the attempt to "furnish worldly society with an ecclesiastical cupola or wing",[24] by means of the creation of a new church suited to the day, modelled on democratic or socialist lines. He likened this to a clericalization of society, on the lines of the medieval Christendom. The temptation offered in such a programme should be resisted as a betrayal of society, he suggested. Given the nature of the lecture's original audience, it is not surprising to learn that the response was not one of universal approval.[25]

The restlessness, the discontent with the ways of the world which Barth described at the outset of the lecture has to be deepened before it can bear theological fruit. If the ways of the world are not ultimate authorities for us this is not just because we share a general perception of the inadequacy of past and present social norms. It is, Barth says, "*not only* because we have been shamed into becoming wise by the outward events of our times".[26] There is another reason, arising from the movement of God into the world, in history and in human consciousness, a "movement of Life into life". In the light of this movement of God, the unreality of all that is not rooted in that movement becomes plain. What is striking here is that the general restlessness earlier described must be reinforced with the assitance of some Kantian terminology before it can be useful theologically:

> Dead are all 'things in themselves' (*Dinge an sich*), all the heres and theres,

[22] Barth, *WGWM*, 272.

[23] By Busch, see *Karl Barth*, p. 111.

[24] Barth, *WGWM*, 280.

[25] McCormack, *CRDT*, 195-6, has a brief description of the background to the conference, summarizing a fuller account given by F.W. Marquardt in *Der Christ in der Gesellschaft*, 1919-1979, (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich, 1980), 7-24. As McCormack comments, Barth's view of religious socialism by this time was so negative that it would have been hard to find a more unsuitable speaker for a Religious Socialist conference. See also Busch, *Karl Barth*, 111, where it is mentioned that at least one person, Carl Mennicke, "left in a fury".

[26] Barth, *WGWM*, 289.

> all the onces and nows, all the thises and thats which are not united to each other. Dead are all mere facts. Dead is all metaphysics. Dead were God himself if he moved his world only from the outside, if he were a 'thing in himself' and not the One in all, the Creator of all things visible and invisible, the beginning and ending.[27]

Interestingly, it is at precisely at this point that Barth makes explicit reference to Expressionism. He includes it in a list of "strangely confused and ambiguous movements of our times" which, he argues, are properly understood as protests against the complacent certainties of the previous generation, and therefore protests against the underlying assumption of human autonomy. The list includes the youth movements of the period, which Barth takes to be a protest against authority for its own sake; the dissolution of traditional attitudes to the family, which he takes as an attack on the family for its own sake; Expressionism, an attack on art for its own sake; the Spartacist and communist movements on the political left, an attack on economic activity for its own sake; and finally the questioning of religion and the church, a protest against religion for its own sake. Barth does not suggest lending these movements unqualified approval: they are liable "*here* to be halted by the interdict of the old and *there* to be formed into new and godless materialisms".[28] But they nonetheless should be understood as part of a single movement, a "shaking of the foundations of the world" which is at one with our God-given restlessness, and which can be understood, if we have "the insight of God"[29] to be the divine negation of this world, God's judgement of the world which takes place when he sets his own righteousness over against it.

Barth's reference to Expressionism is important, then, despite its brevity. His comments, though, are ambiguous as to whether he himself had any feeling for Expressionist art. The presence or absence of such a feeling is beside the point, though:

> However strong our aversion may be to the work of the modern expressionistic artists, it is more than clear that for these men the chief concern is the essence, the content, the referring of the beautiful to life's unity ... For this tendency as well we must spare more than a shake of

[27] Barth, *WGWM*, 291. See also Appendix A below, pp. 251-8.
[28] Ibid. 292.
[29] Ibid. 294.

the head.[30]

It is striking that Barth is able to speak of Expressionism as part of a single movement which is God's movement, a critical opposition of Life to life. He sees it as something analogous to revolutionary Socialism, a protest against a reality not grounded in the movement of God.[31] It is, moreover, interesting that Barth's reference to Expressionism in this lecture should characterize it as an attack on art for the sake of art. Clearly what impressed Barth about Expressionism was not its sense of ushering in a new world and a new humanity, but its negative side, its sense of the dissolution of the bourgeois world and its artistic conventions and aims.[32]

iii. Barth's first theology and early Expressionism.

The question of affinities between Expressionism and Barth's writing more generally has yet to be addressed, though. This is the task of the remainder of this chapter, beginning with Barth's earliest theology and the Expressionism of the pre-War period. Is there, then, anything in Barth's pre-1915 theology which reflects the birth of Expressionism? The obvious

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[30] Barth, *WGWM*, 292.

[31] The parallel with politics is revealing for Barth's view of modern art, perhaps. Bruce McCormack draws attention to the fact that in this lecture Barth called for support for the democratic socialists in their participation within the Republican government, rather than for the Spartacists. See *WGWM*, 319. Barth says: "*Today* there is a call for large-hearted, far-sighted, characterful conduct toward *democracy* — no, not *toward* it as irresponsible onlookers and critics, but *within* it, as hope-sharing and guilt-sharing comrades". As McCormack says, (*CRDT*, 201) Barth could be classified as a *Vernuftrepublikaner*, a 'rational republican', albeit from the socialist side rather than the nationalist-imperialist side. Yet it was the anti-republican Spartacists that he pointed to as (inadvertent) witnesses to the divine negation of this world. In a similar manner, Barth's indication of Expressionism as a witness of this sort did not presuppose that he gave any personal or even theological approval to Expressionism as a programme for art or literature.

[32] The most radical attack on established art, of course, came from the Dadaism born in the *Cabaret Voltaire*, in which the very idea of the work of art came under fire. It is by no means impossible that the Zürich milieu in which Barth encountered modern art directed his attention particularly to its negative side, its rejection of the forms, conventions and values of the art of previous periods. Barth certainly knew something of Dadaism by 1921, for he made reference to it in the second *Romans*, see p. 194. Too much should not be made of this, though, for Barth could have derived his view of Expressionism perfectly well from more mainstream literature. See for example the comments of Kurt Pinthus in the preface to *Menschheitsdämmerung*, op. cit. p. xiv: "Nowhere have aesthetic values and the principle of art-for-art's sake been so flouted as in this poetry, which has come to be called 'modern' or 'expressionist' because it erupts, explodes, has an intensity which it must have in order to break through the hostile crust of aestheticism ...". Quoted by Taylor op. cit. 34.

answer is no. Barth's Herrmannian theology, like the neo-Kantian philosophy on which it drew, was essentially confident. Despite the challenges of modern science and philosophy it claimed a genuine relation with God, a relation which secured and grounded the existence of the subject. The aim of this theology was to secure a stable place for religion within the world. There is no apocalyptic note in it, no sense of the emptiness of the bourgeois appeals to truth, goodness and beauty; there is no sense of a radical break with this world and its values. There is nothing, then, which recalls the distinctive voice and mood of early Expressionism. In so far as Expressionism was "a deep-seated *Angst* before the spectre of modernity",[33] Barth's Herrmannian theology seems to breathe a different air.

Yet to rest content with this negative answer would be to miss something important about Barth's earliest theology, and about neo-Kantianism. For the point which Sokel made about the affinity between the experience of modernity and Kant's critique of knowledge is all the stronger if one amends Kant in the way in which the neo-Kantians did. It was Marburg neo-Kantianism, more than Kant, which emphasized the constructive nature of thought, and which therefore challenged the notion that "a given external creation, a cosmos, exists outside man".[34] It was neo-Kantianism, rather than Kant, which accorded with Sokel's description of the "trends of our century" which seek "to transcend the 'givenness' of nature by asserting the autonomous and creative potentiality of the mind".[35] Marburg neo-Kantianism displays a remarkable affinity with what Sokel called "the technological age", in which ephemerality and transience come to prominence at the expense of a sense of the permanence and givenness of the world.

In the light of this, it is not too strong to say that the central ideas of neo-Kantian philosophy were in substantial accord with the ideas which lay at

[33] This is Bruce McCormack's description of the basic spirit of Expressionism. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 33.
[34] Sokel, *WE*, 117. Neo-Kantianism has this in common with most post-Kantian idealism, from Fichte onwards. For some discussion of whether the influences on Barth were Kantian or neo-Kantian, see Appendix A below, pp. 251-8.
[35] Ibid. 117.

the heart of modernist movements. And this, of course, implies a connection between neo-Kantianism and Expressionism. The two clearest illustrations of this connection are probably the proclamation by Werfel of the Expressionists' task as the "desubstantivation of the world", and, even more clearly, the insistence of Gottfried Benn on the necessity of the *"konstruktive Geist"* or "constructive mind".[36] Benn's idea is a particularly clear reflection of the modernist turn away from the notion that we know and can represent a reality which exists independently of our consciousness of it. Sokel's comments on it are worth quoting here:

> Benn's concept of art has nothing in common with the traditional view of art as representation of reality or as a confession of experience. Like Kaiser, Benn is not interested in the personality of the artist; nor is he concerned with the raw material of art nor with the psychological effect of the finished work. Indeed his poetry is addressed 'to no one.' He is solely interested in the method of artistic creation, in the sifting, organizing, condensing activity of the mind in the process of creating. The constructive mind, as Benn understands it, is not a 'what' but a 'how'; it is a method of organizing data into significant patterns. ... The ideal art which he envisions has no content; it is nothing but form. It is to embody the complete triumph of mental organization over the resistance of matter. The raw material, the 'data' given by nature — and nature includes human nature — should be sucked up and made to disappear in the formal structure of the work.[37]

In so describing Benn's idea Sokel has, possibly unwittingly, highlighted its strong resemblance to Marburg neo-Kantianism, with its rejection of any metaphysics of substance, its unwillingness to grant sensation a role in the construction of knowledge, and its belief in law-governed thought as the source of both knowledge and being. Both Expressionism and neo-Kantianism abandoned a metaphysics of substance in favour of a belief in the constructive character of thought, consistent with the experience of modernity marked by ephemerality and fragmentation.

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[36] See Sokel, *WE*, 116. These ideas, of course, also illustrate the fact that Expressionism was not fundamentally opposed to modernity, but was highly consistent with it. To this extent, an important qualification has to made of the view expressed above: while Expressionism was indeed a response to modernity, it is a mistake to think that its mood was always dominated by *Angst*.

[37] Ibid. 115-6. A much briefer and more general statement of Benn's principle is given by Richard Samuel in respect of Expressionism generally - see Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 12. He says that Expressionism believed that "reality must be created by ourselves, because only in our own soul is the image of the world kept pure and unfalsified".

What, though, does all of this imply for the early theology of Karl Barth? The important thing is this: in so far as the theologies of Herrmann and the young Barth were engaged with neo-Kantianism, they were already engaged with the ideas which lay at the heart of modernist movements. If a theologian with such engagements were to begin to feel himself estranged from the bourgeois world of late Wilhelmine Germany, it would be a short step indeed to the unrest of early Expressionism. The restless socialism of Barth's pre-War sermons and lectures, of course, suggests precisely this kind of estrangement.

I shall return to Barth's socialism shortly. In the meantime, I want to draw attention to the fact that the theologies of Herrmann and the young Barth had already turned in a direction which made this step even simpler, in their rejection of the monism of Cohen and Natorp. Religion, as has already been noted, posed something of a problem for neo-Kantianism. And Herrmann's dualistic solution to it was hardly orthodox, from the philosophers' point of view. Fisher's observations about this are useful:

> Such dualism of faith was certainly not welcome to Marburg *Religionsphilosophie*, not only on account of its confessional or apologetic character, but additionally because it threatened to upset the system by advocating two major asymmetries. First, it was asserted by Herrmann that another reality existed *ausserhalb* that monism of experience which was the central presupposition of Marburg philosophy. Secondly, moreover, Herrmann's own theological epistemology contradicted the general epistemology of the Marburg philosophers. Their claim was that for human cognition *alles aufgegeben ist*, whilst Herrmann suggested that the reality encountered in the Christian religion is *gegeben* through a special experience, namely, revelation.[38]

Barth followed Herrmann in this rejection of "Marburg ontology and its logical monism".[39] What this amounted to, in Barth's case in particular, was not simply the introduction of a new element in the philosophers' system, but an attempt to rebuild the system on a different ground. It is at this point that the influence of Barth's brother Heinrich is particularly important. Heinrich had studied at Marburg, like Karl, and in 1913 submitted a dissertation to the University of Bern entitled *Descartes Begründung der Erkenntnis*. The argument of this work amounted to a theistic

[38] Fisher, op. cit. 135-6.
[39] Ibid. 193.

reinterpretation of Cohen, and in particular of his category of the *Ursprung*. Heinrich identified Descartes as the historical root of neo-Kantianism's notion of the originary power of human thought; but he also disputed the adequacy of Descartes' attempt to ground the human subject in the *cogito*. Instead he argued for a grounding of the subject and of being in a wholly transcendent reality. This amounted to an inversion of Cohen's thought, relocating originary power in the divine mind. Karl was aware of his brother's ideas at an early stage, and may well have been influenced by them; though there was in any case a fair amount in common between Heinrich's views and the Herrmannian response to neo-Kantianism. Fisher describes the results of this type of thinking as follows:

> Thought no longer actualized its possibilities by virtue of its innate dynamism; the revealed actuality of God rather actualized the subject, who then received power to construct a cultural order in which truth, beauty, and goodness would continuously become incarnate.[40]

The result of this was that revelatory experience became the ground of the individual, of science, and of culture. The consequence, of course, was to undermine the possibility of reality and actuality outside this revelatory experience. This method has, in Fisher's words, the "unfortunate result of leaving the world and its culture to their own devices, consigning them to the shadowland of semblance, resembling that inhabited by Plato's cave-dwellers."[41] Troeltsch, Fisher notes additionally, was alert to this problem and criticized Herrmann vigorously for a reduction of everything outside the Christian consciousness to utter *Sehnsucht* or longing.[42]

By giving the Christian consciousness such prominence, the theologies of Herrmann and Barth left the world at large in a thoroughly ambiguous position. In Barth's revelatory monism (as Fisher calls it) the reality of anything not determined by the Christian consciousness becomes deeply problematic. In this way Barth's earliest theology was unwittingly prepared for the transformation that would come over it when he could no longer

[40] Fisher, op. cit. 324.
[41] Ibid. 326.
[42] Ibid. 325.

take revelatory experience as given.[43]

iv. Barth's restless socialism and early Expressionism

The critical question about Barth's early socialism is whether it can be seen as an expression of estrangement from the bourgeois world of pre-War Europe. I would argue that it can. Barth's plunge into socialism in the middle of 1911 appears to be related to the widespread sense of unrest in Europe in the years immediately before the outbreak of war. From the beginning, as already noted, Barth's admiration of and commitment to socialism had more to do with its aims than its actual practices. A distinction between goals and means was present in Barth's socialism from the beginning. It enabled Barth, from the beginning, to give full weight to socialism's radical critique of the bourgeois world and its values, unimpeded by worries about militant revolutionary methods. The typical tone of his socialism was therefore one of unrest, of a radical critique of this world and its ways.

It is not surprising, then, that Barth's sermons from the period before the War often exemplify this tone of restlessness, assimilating the socialist critique of capitalist society to the divine word of judgement. Bruce McCormack's discussion of these sermons is valuable, highlighting the emergence of the theme of judgement, of an embryonic critique of religion, and of the idea of the wholly-other God in the sermons of 1913.[44] Each of these themes is notable as an anticipation of Barth's later theology; and of course they largely stand apart from his 'official' Herrmannian theology before the War. I would suggest, however, that these themes have a further significance in this context: they indicate the extent to which Barth's ideas were consistent with the mood of unrest and longing exemplified by

[43] It is undoubtedly for this reason that Marburg thought in general and Herrmann's theology in particular were continuing influences not only on Barth but on others involved in the the new theological movements of the twenties and thirties - notably Rudolf Bultmann.

[44] McCormack, *CRDT*, 92-104.

Expressionism at this time.[45]

There are many points at which this is clear. For example, by 1913 Barth was expressing scepticism about the idea of continuous cultural and moral progress:

> Or our *modern culture* of which many are so proud! ... would we not like to cry out here once again: Dead works! when we place alongside these accomplishments the fact that self-seeking and superficiality and uncertainty in the most important things are nowadays, in spite of everything, greater than ever?[46]

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[45] The circle connected with the journal *Die Aktion* made the link between socialism and Expressionism explicit. Note for example that van Hoddis' 'Weltende' was first published in a journal with the title (in translation) *The Democrat. Journal for liberal politics and literature.* This had been edited by Franz Pfemfert, subsequently the founder and editor of *Die Aktion*. Pfemfert himself wrote political commentaries in *Die Aktion*, and it also included contributions from Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. (See Raabe, *EGE*, 35-7.) The political atmosphere of *Die Aktion* has been described as "anarchism, pacifism, anti-authoritarianism, and anti-militarism". (ibid. 18.) Pfemfert was once retrospectively described as "the only man in Germany openly opposed to the obligatory war hysteria". (ibid. 342.) See also the extract in Raabe entitled "The political significance of *Die Aktion*", pp. 181 -5. However a word of caution is necessary here. Certainly Expressionism and socialism cannot be identified in a simple way. For one thing, Expressionism was sufficiently varied for its proponents to offer their allegiance to a variety of political causes, including nationalism. For another, socialism itself was then, as now, a somewhat malleable term. Bruce McCormack (*CRDT*, 117-8, n. 100) notes the wide range of views represented in Swiss religious socialism. More significantly, socialism was a term appropriated by both ends of the political spectrum in the Weimar Republic. Peter Gay notes the importance of Spengler's 1920 political pamphlet *Preussentum und Sozialismus* in this respect. In it Spengler accepted the inevitability of socialism in some form. But he distinguished English Socialism (in which he included Marx) from German Socialism. Gay notes Spengler's shrewdness in identifying a distinct 'German' strand the socialism of his day. He quotes: "The Bebel party had something soldierly, which distinguished it from the socialism of all other countries: clanking step of the workers' battalions, calm decisiveness, discipline, courage to die for something higher—*Jenseitiges*." (Gay *Weimar Culture*, 85.) Spengler's idea of an authoritarian, anti-democratic, German form of socialism is like a prophetic vision of the National Socialism which was to come to power some thirteen years later, with such disastrous consequences. His notion of such a socialism dedicated to something 'beyond' or 'other' (*jenseitig*) is also sobering. It indicates the possible political ambivalence of anti-bourgeois sentiments, socialist involvement and the appeal to things *jenseitig*. (The lack of unanimity on political matters among the dialectical theologians is perhaps not so puzzling in this light.) It is hardly surprising, given the above, that Expressionism's anti-bourgeois convictions and unrest were able to produce writers with political sympathies as varied as Johannes Becher, later Minister of Culture in the German Democratic Republic (from 1954) and Hanns Johst, who under Hitler became President of the Reichsschriftumskammer, President of the Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung, Reichskultursenator, and first holder of the NSDAP prize for Art and Science. (On Johst, see J.M. Ritchie 'Johst's *Schlageter* and the End of the Weimar Republic' in Bance op. cit. 153 - 167.)

[46] Barth, *Predigten 1913*, 125; sermon 21 March 1913. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 95. Again this critical note contrasts quite sharply with the belief in progress which he had affirmed so strongly in his reply to Herr Hüssy little more than a year earlier. See chapter 1 above.

Again, he could by this time offer his congregation a picture of their lives as being immersed in a battle between two opposing worlds: "on this boundary, a battle is raging. Two gigantic kingdoms are engaged in a war with one another. ... We have to become participants on one side or the other."[47] He could talk of divine law breaking through the customary order of things, of Jesus carrying out a revolution: "when the divine appears in human form, there must always be a revolution against human order".[48] He could talk of God effecting a "transformation" of "all corrupt and defective human order".[49] He could talk in vivid images that reflected a contemporary mood of impending doom: "Catastrophes and violent storms must serve the coming of His Kingdom."[50] Such examples make it clear that Barth's preaching at this time made use of ideas analogous to those that gave early Expressionism its distinctive voice; in fact Barth's vivid images - of the war between two worlds, of the inadequacy of the customary order of things, of transformation, of the storms that accompany the new world - all these are highly reminiscent of the language and mood of much early Expressionism.[51]

v. Barth's revolution: 'origin' and 'constructive mind'

I have already, in chapter 1, described Barth's theological revolution as provoked by his loss of confidence in the givenness of God in religious experience. The theology which emerged involved prominently the notion of the dissolution of the world under divine judgement, something which

47 Barth, *Predigten 1913*, 143; sermon 23 March 1913. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 96.

48 Ibid. 38; sermon 19 January 1913. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 98.

49 Ibid. 79; sermon 2 March 1913. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 101.

50 Ibid. 93; sermon 9 March 1913. See McCormack, *CRDT* 102.

51 Take for example the comments about *Der Sturm* by Lothar Schreyer, its managing editor from 1916-26: "The storm purifies, uproots, destroys. But it also roars through the world like the Holy Ghost. It is the never-ending transformation, the renewal from the ground up, the cypher under which the spiritual truth of the Absolute meets the frailty and hope of temporal existence. Hope—even if often despairing—brings us the joys, our frailty the sorrows." (Raabe, *EGE*, 194.) Or see some comments made by Wassily Kandinsky in 1913: "Painting is like a thundering collision of different worlds that are destined in and through conflict to create that new world called the work. Technically, every work of art comes into being in the same way as the cosmos - by means of catastrophes, which ultimately create out of the cacophony of the various instruments that symphony we call the music of the spheres." From Kandinsky's *Reminiscences*, quoted in *Kandinsky* by Ulrike Becks-Malorny, (Benedikt Taschen Verlag, Köln, 1994), 88.

drew both on Barth's Herrmannian, neo-Kantian influenced theology, and on socialist critique. It also developed a dialectical conception of the relation between God and the world which can be seen to have roots in both Herrmann's stress on the transcendence of God and in Barth's socialism with its restless distinction between aims and means. Not only was Barth's Herrmannian theology transformed by his loss of confidence; also transformed was his socialism, which could no longer claim a simple connection between the aims of socialism and the Kingdom of God. The basis for continuing faith of any sort was provided by a feature of Barth's earlier inverted neo-Kantian emphasis on God as 'origin': the basis for faith was God's action, breaking into this world, albeit unable now to be treated as a 'given'.

In the light of all that has been said so far in this chapter, I would now argue that Barth's revolution was in fact the theological equivalent of the Expressionist revolution in culture. As such it was a theological response to the condition and experience of modernity; and I would even go so far as to call Barth's new theology an inventive and uncompromising appropriation of modernism. The emergence of Barth's distinctive theology was consequent upon his loss of confidence in the moral, cultural and intellectual world of the nineteenth century; just as Expressionism was born of a loss of confidence in that world and its values. The theology which emerged reflected its two sources: a philosophy which was deeply engaged with modernity, and a socialism which reflected the contemporary restlessness and sense of the dissolution of the bourgeois world. The latter gave Barth's thought its urgency, its self-critical edge, its sense of crisis. The former supplied it with its basic framework of divine absoluteness and human relativity. The anchor for Barth's theology before 1915 had been the possession of God in the experience of faith; from 1915 onward this anchor was removed, and in its place was a lacuna. How could anything of this theology stand without its centre, though? The answer seems to have been that it no longer sought to stand on its own feet. The critical thought here came from Barth's restless socialism - the idea of the judgement of God, the radical opposition between the kingdom of God and this world. God dissolves as well as creates; God is the *destruktive Geist* as well as the

konstruktive Geist. It should be no surprise if theology lacks a centre - theology with a centre other than God is not theology; but God is not given to us to provide us with a centrepiece for our theological construction. Theology too is suffering dissolution under the judgement of God. As a result of all this, Barth was effectively able to make a virtue out of that quality in Herrmann's theology which Troeltsch had criticized: that it made everything outside the Christian consciousness into sheer longing. Now with the collapse of the Christian consciousness, Barth's theology could accept this longing as inescapable. When theology understands this it comes to understand *itself* as longing. As he would later point out, theology becomes only an instance of the sigh *Veni Creator Spiritus!*[52]

The affinity between this theology and Expressionism is primarily a matter of the ideas which animated both. Expressionism's diversity was clustered round a centre provided by the loss of a metaphysics of substance, displaced by a sense of contingency and ephemerality; by the sense of the loss of the mimetic power of the artist's language and of given conventions of representation; and by the consequent shift from a mimetic to an expressive aesthetic. It oscillated between the positive pole of the sovereign freedom of the creative mind, and the negative pole of the artist's estrangement from community, symptomatic of a more general sense of rootlessness, of estrangement from previously-accepted social conventions. Barth's theology likewise reflected the loss of the metaphysics of substance, and suggested a corresponding sense of the ephemerality of created reality standing under judgement. It likewise focused on the lack of mimetic power in language and the inadequacy of conventions of representation - above all as regards our language about God and our conventions for representing the divine. In its turn towards a dialectical method it reflects a sense that our language about God has no power to represent God, but ought rather to express our situation i.e. our inability to speak of God. Dialectics is the form of this theology because the contradiction of thesis and antithesis expresses our inability. Dialectics is therefore a method analogous to an expressive aesthetic: it does not *state* the truth of the matter; it can only point to it by adopting a style which does not aim at mimesis.

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[52] Barth, *WGWM*, 134.

This theology does not require to erect barriers round some foundational knowledge exempt from the dissolution effected by the divine, not even around the minimal demand of an experiential unity of faith and revelation which can acquire no magnitude in cognitive discourse. The source of this dissolution is not just critical-historical method, or scientific advance. It is not just one particular culture that has been found wanting by another. The experience of modernity gives the lie to all previous illusions of security. The source of this dissolution is God, and so the dissolution is universal. Reality is grounded in the divine constructive mind, and only that; any pretensions that we can apprehend a stable and substantial reality are dissolved by it. Our social and cultural contexts of meaning lose their validity, being seen for the contingent constructs that they are. Theology in the modern world had tended to proceed by a series of retreats, each marking out ever smaller boundaries for a region of theological truth-claims, boundaries at which the expanding claims of scientific and historical disciplines could be repulsed. With Barth, theology becomes modern in a new sense. There is no space left behind the barriers. There is nothing left to defend. The Church and its teachings are flawed and relative, through and through.

To emphasize the negative so strongly, though, raises the question of what room there is left for anything positive, and therefore of the ground of this negative also. It sounds at the moment as if the term 'modern theology' is an oxymoron. The key to the positive must be found in the fact that the judgement against the world, including the Church and its speech, is God's judgement. And as judgement it is therefore also grace. The dialectical relation of judgement and grace is explicit in Barth's writing as early as March 1913, in one of the sermons which McCormack quotes:

> But judgement too cannot be the last word of God. Judgement too must be a means and the way of His grace. When God judges and punishes, He is at the same time the Creator who calls new life into existence. Catastrophes

and violent storms must serve the coming of His Kingdom.[53]

It is also important to note, in this regard, that the dialectic of judgement and grace in Barth's sermons had an analogue in his brother Heinrich's thought. The key to this was the fact that the *Ursprung* subjects knowledge and being to a critical negation as well as providing their ground. For this philosophy: "Logic and science are true to the *Ursprung* in that they subject the givenness of contents to a radical negation in order to erect them anew in accordance with their own laws."[54] It is widely recorded that Karl Barth was impressed and influenced by his brother Heinrich's work in the period between the two versions of *Romans*.[55] It is also clear, though, that he had early knowledge of his brother's dissertation of 1913, in which the essentials of Heinrich's modification of neo-Kantianism are contained. Proof of this early knowledge is in the fact that Karl referred to it in a footnote to his 1913 article 'Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott'.[56] That reference comes at a

[53] See McCormack, *CRDT*, 102. Apart from anything else, it is notable that there is a clear affinity here between the relation of judgement and grace and the Expressionists' idea that a new world and a new humanity would be born through the collapse of the old order, through the sufferings of their own time. See for example Margarete Susman's comments, quoted in Taylor op. cit. 34: "Our world must be made new, but this can only come about in agonised convulsions—there is no other way. The days of serenity, of gracefulness, of reticence, of modesty are over. God does not come to us ill-starred mortals on the wings of a gentle breeze. Expressionism has a mission in which beauty plays no part. When Expressionism has become the sole will and principle of an age, and when the naked soul kneels down and cries out to God, beauty is like a robe that has been consumed by flames, while despair manifests itself in forms filled only with the sound of screams and prayers." Another example quoted by Taylor is from a speech by the eponymous heroine of Hasenclever's *Antigone*, of 1917: "Palaces totter. Power is at an end.
Those who were once great will plunge into the abyss,
The gates crash shut behind them.
Those who owned everything have lost everything; The slave sweating at his job
Is richer than they.
Follow me! I shall lead you.
The wind stirs among the ruins;
The new world dawns. ...
Food and rewards for everyone;
Blood has flowed;
War will perish;
Nations will stretch out their hands in friendship."
See Taylor, 46. He gives a reference to act 5, scene 3. The passage is actually from act 5, scene 2.

[54] Heinrich Barth 'Gotteserkenntnis' in Moltmann (ed.) *Die Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, vol. I, 238. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 222.

[55] See Barth's letter to Thurneysen of 13th April 1919 for example, in *B-Th. Br. I.* 456. See also Busch *Karl Barth* 109, and McCormack, *CRDT*, 223. See also Werner Ruschke op. cit. particularly 83-87 and 118-124.

[56] Barth, *GPG*, 72.

point in the article at which Karl both connects the concept of God to the category of the *Ursprung*, and suggests a dialectic of affirmation and negation:

> To question the foundation of 'reality' as such is to affirm it at the same time. ... The 'unfounded' becomes the ground for the foundation of what is thought and willed, the pure deduction to pure origin (*Ursprung*). It is the truth and validity which rests in itself—the truth and validity of the a priori—that manifests itself here as the positive component of the concept of God.[57]

It is perhaps significant also that Heinrich had stressed the non-givenness of this divine origin. For Heinrich this philosophy was essentially a mutual correction of German idealism and Plato, and to that extent a continuation of philosophy in the great tradition of western metaphysics. Unlike his theological brother, though, Heinrich's stress on the non-givenness of God did not involve the traumatic loss of something previously taken to be secure.[58] What fends off nihilism in Karl Barth's new theology, on this account, is his assimilation of the idea of God as the transcendent, non-given *Ursprung*, and therefore his drift towards a 'revelatory monism', in place of Herrmann's dualism of faith.

One major issue arises from all this, though: doesn't such a revelatory monism amount to an attempt to return behind Kant and modernity

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[57] Barth, *GPG*, 72. Quoted by Fisher, 266. Fisher is correct to see Karl Barth in 1913 already appropriating his brother's religious interpretation of neo-Kantianism. However he is surely mistaken to suggest, on p. 303, that Heinrich Barth's dissertation was the object of Karl's later polemics against 'theological Cartesianism'. This dissertation, while seeing Descartes as anticipating neo-Kantianism, argued for a correction of both. To this extent he was surely the source of his brother's critique of theological Cartesianism, rather than its object.

[58] McCormack notes (*CRDT*, 221, n. 37.) how Heinrich, apparently untouched by the collapse of neo-Kantianism in the aftermath of the War, continued to seek a way forward on the lines he had already developed, i.e. following the Marburg school, which he took to be a continuation of "classical philosophy". Heinrich's unwillingness to abandon neo-Kantianism - particularly in its religious interpretation - need not be seen as an anachronistic attempt to cling to the past, nor as disconfirmation of the suggested affinity between his brother's thought and Expressionism. Karl, like his brother, did not see any need to reject what he'd gained from neo-Kantianism wholesale after the war, in favour of phenomenology or anything else. On the contrary, as has been noted, Heinrich exercised a renewed influence on him. It is also worth noting that Heinrich's views did change over time. Fisher notes, p. 11: "Heinrich's adoption of existentialism was slow and reluctant, but this stance clearly distinguishes his *Erkenntnis der Existenz*, which was posthumously published in 1965."

altogether? Isn't this inversion an attempt to provide secure foundation for theological speech, and therefore a new basis for mimesis generally? This is a possibility which has to be taken seriously. It is essentially the same point that is at stake in accusations that Barth adopted a positivism of revelation. Certainly, even Heinrich's account of the knowledge of God in his 1919 lecture involved recourse to the idea of revelation. He noted, as McCormack points out, that "the consciousness which men and women have of the *Ursprung* is not to be had through 'living and moving in God' but rather 'in Christ'. ... The resurrection testifies to the truth we have forgotten: that *the* truth of human existence is that our Origin lies in God and that the decision which men and women were seeking in the revolutionary events of the time had already been made in God."[59] In the case of Karl, it is even clearer that it is not neo-Kantian logic which leads to knowledge of God as Origin but God's act of revelation. The critical thing, though, is that revelation is not a given quantity; and more importantly it is something which we are not of ourselves capable of receiving. The *diastasis* between God and world, even between God's revelation and the human subject, is that which wards off any accusation of positivism, and which counts against the charge that Barth restores metaphysics to try to provide a new ground for mimesis.

The question of whether Barth's theology avoids a repristination of pre-Kantian metaphysics becomes, then, the question of whether revelation is possible on these terms. Are the negations and affirmations described above commensurable? How can the wholly other God who negates the world in judgement and affirms it in grace can be apprehended? How can the *diastasis* be bridged without imploding? If it is unbridged, if revelation does not take place, then the whole account falls as a self-deceptive and ungrounded speculation. Yet if it is bridged how can we still talk in terms of a *diastasis*? If the gulf between God and the world has been bridged how can

[59] McCormack, *CRDT*, 222-3.

there still be a gulf?[60] The story of the development of Barth's theology from this point on is the story of his strategies for dealing with this problem - usefully and neatly classified by McCormack as stages marked by process eschatology, by consistent eschatology, and by anhypostatic/enhypostatic christology. The question of whether Barth's theology ultimately reflects or ignores the modernist crisis of representation can only be answered by considering the results of these strategies.

vi. Expressionism and Barth's new theology

I have argued above that the affinities between Barth's theology and Expressionism run deep, and are by no means merely matters of literary style or vocabulary; yet there were *also*, not surprisingly, similarities in style

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[60] This particular question highlights the difference between Barth's views before and after 1915. Barth insisted, even before 1915, on the transcendence of God, on the impossibility of natural knowledge of God, and on the impossibility of expressing revealed truth in human language. But his understanding of revelation as self-authenticating, establishing a relational nexus between the divine and the human, effectively breached the *diastasis*. Such a theology was indeed very close to neo-Platonism, and, as Fisher points out, is open to the charge of revelational positivism. See Fisher, 334-5. There is a misconception in Bruce McCormack's comment on Fisher's view: see McCormack, *CRDT*, 219. He says that Karl Barth stood under the influence of Heinrich, rather than Cohen, at this point; therefore his thinking was not positivistic. McCormack is correct that Heinrich Barth's thought was distinguished from Cohen at this point, and that Karl was to some extent influenced by him. See ibid. p. 220, where McCormack rightly points out that it was Heinrich's emphasis on non-givenness which "made his thinking alien to all forms of positivism". But on this point Karl was clearly *not* under his brother's influence before 1915. On the contrary, at that time Karl insisted on the givenness of God in revelation. It is precisely on this account that Fisher supports the description of Karl's thought at this time as positivistic. Fisher makes absolutely clear, though, that he is making no judgement as to the appropriateness of this accusation against Barth's post-1915 theology (see Fisher, 335). Moreover McCormack's comments on this matter are not consistent: on p. 219 he asserts both that Karl's understanding of the *Ursprung* was "at this point under the influence of Heinrich", and also that it "was controlled by a theological understanding which was not shared by his brother". McCormack makes a further criticism of Fisher on the subject of the location of originary thought in God, which also fails to hit the mark. He says, at p. 219, "Fisher was wrong, however, to think that this move only took place in the chaos of the post-war period; it had already been initiated by Heinrich Barth in the pre-war period." Fisher did not state, as McCormack suggests, that the re-attribution of originary thought to the divine mind only took place after the War. His account of Barth's pre-war theology makes the presence of this move quite clear. It also makes clear that it was Heinrich who was primarily responsible for this move. See Fisher chapter 5 generally, and in particular p. 266: "Cohen's last book of religious philosophy seems to have made the totality of ideas into the thoughts of God, ... with the deity therefore becoming a divine principle of origin. Barth anticipated Cohen in this move, but he should not be credited with originality on that account, for such a religious interpretation of Marburg philosophy had already been advanced in the doctoral thesis of his philosopher brother, Heinrich Barth."

and language. These became more obvious in the writings that emerged from Barth's theological 'revolution'. After 1915, Expressionistic language begins to appear outside the pulpit, in lectures first of all and then in the lengthy commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans written during the second half of the War. An early example is in the lecture "Die neue Welt in der Bibel", delivered in Leutwil on 6th February 1917. In trying to describe the strangeness of the biblical world, in that lecture, Barth suggests that as we read the biblical narrative we "are aware of something like the tremors of an earthquake or like the ceaseless thundering of ocean waves against thin dikes".[61] There is a clear resonance in such language of the rising tides of 'Weltende'.[62] However the most significant Expressionistic quality in this lecture is simply the idea of the new world as something quite distinct from but also related to this world. The 'Messianic Expressionism' of the later War years also focused on the idea of a new humanity and a new world, in accord with its tendency to convert the visualization of inner states to a vision of social renewal. At the same time as Barth began to stress the idea of a new world, in fact, Expressionism began to think in very similar terms, and to speak in very similar language.

The Expressionistic images evident in the Leutwil lecture are evident also in the first edition of *Romans*. One example has already been quoted: the image of flood-tides bursting through dams from Barth's discussion of Romans 13:4. He talked, it will be recalled, of healing unrest (*heilsam Unruhe*) reinforcing "the flood-tide of the divine which is rising all around, and which will one day by itself tear apart the dams".[63] There is an ambiguity about this imagery, as in much Expressionism; chaos and catastrophe imply judgement, but also grace: the unrest can heal, and the destructive tide is also the influx of the divine, suggesting the dawning of a new age.

The comparison between the first *Romans* and Expressionism is once again much more than a matter of style and vocabulary, though. In fact the commentary's 'process' eschatology, which is so fundamental to it, has

61 Barth, *WGWM*, 29.

62 This is not to say that Barth was familiar with van Hoddis' poem, necessarily. Such imagery was the common property of Expressionism. There was for example a journal with the title *Die Flut*. See Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 2.

63 *Der Römerbrief (Erste Fassung) 1919*, 508.

much in common with Expressionism, and with modernist ideas generally. The commentary draws a distinction between 'so-called history' and 'real history'. The former, the history of the world as we perceive and know it, is a history which proceeds from the Fall of humankind out of a relation of immediacy to God. It is a history, therefore, of judgement, a "history of alienation, ambiguity, and death", as McCormack puts it.[64] However there is another history, 'real history', which is quite distinct from this. It is the history of God, and in its light " 'so-called history' is seen to be less than real, that is, mere appearance".[65] Barth's eschatology envisages a relation of these two histories as a process, a turning which is taking place throughout time. These two histories are movements, and they are related in a process in which one is coming to an end the other is beginning. This eschatology is anti-individualistic, envisaging salvation as the redemption of the whole. Moreover it is not that the old world has within it the power to give birth to the new: rather the possibility of the new is hidden, a divine possibility not visible in the old.

Barth's eschatology here bears a remarkable resemblance to the Expressionist ideas about the dissolution of the old world and the rising of a new one.[66] What I want to draw attention to particularly, though, is the fact that an emphasis on process and function was typical of the whole of modernism. Barth's concepts display the same transfer of substance into process that we noted in the previous chapter. As Sokel put it:

> the concept of 'being' yields to the concept of 'functioning'. This is the Expressionist ideal of the 'desubstantivation of the world' (Entsubstantivierung der Welt) ... Substance is transferred into process and function; the noun bows to the verb; content becomes method; active *expression* replaces passive *experience*. With these ideas, German Expressionism is completely at one with European modernism.[67]

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64 McCormack, *CRDT*, 142.

65 Ibid. 143.

66 One example is in the comments of Franz Kafka on a postcard to Max Brod in January 1918, concerning the conclusion to Brod's *Das grosse Wagnis*: "it occurred to me that the affirmative conclusion of your novel actually points to something simpler and more obvious than I at first thought, that is the building of a church, an asylum, something of that sort, which will almost undoubtedly come about and is already rising around us as everything crumbles and in the same tempo." See Kafka *Letters* op. cit. 185.

67 Sokel, *WE*, 116.

Like Barth's anti-individualistic eschatology, the turn from substance to process in modernism is a rejection of individualism. Sokel again:

> A substance exists in and for itself; it can be considered an individual. A function on the other hand, has no existence in isolation; it acquires meaning in relation to a totality. The idea of individual personality has meaning in a world of substances; it is meaningless in a universe of pure function and process.[68]

The ideas of the first *Romans*,then, do indeed have a strong relation to Expressionism and modernism. Bruce McCormack is right, then, to note that von Balthasar's description of the second *Romans* as theological Expressionism fails to do justice to the first edition.[69]

vii. Expressionism and the second *Romans*: style and influences.

In spite of what has just been said, however, it is in the second edition of *Romans*, that the analogies between Barth's work and Expressionism multiply. These are particularly clear in the changes in Barth's style of writing and in his imagery. An important instance of this is the rise to prominence of Expressionistic concepts such as the 'new world' and the 'new man'. Barth, of course makes his own use of such terms; but they nonetheless bear the marks of the contemporary context. A good illustration of the prominence of such terminology is Barth's treatment of the fifth chapter of the letter. In the first edition, this section had been given the title of 'The Day'. Verses 1 to 11 were headed 'The New Situation', and verses 12 to 21 headed 'The Victory of Life'. In the second edition, the whole chapter is given the title 'The Coming Day'; the first eleven verses are headed 'The

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68 Sokel, *WE*, 117.

69 McCormack, *CRDT*, 139. McCormack points out that there is a parallel between the first *Romans* and the Expressionist notion that reality lies beneath surface appearance. He also suggests that the first *Romans* was written in "an Expressionistic style". These observations are useful; however they do not perhaps, fully reflect the strength of the analogies between the first *Romans* and contemporary culture. Moreover these are aspects in which, as will shortly become clear, the second *Romans* is considerably more Expressionistic than the first. To this extent I disagree with McCormack when he says that "it is not the expressionistic qualities of the rhetoric of the second edition which sets that work off from its predecessor". (p. 243.) This, unfortunately, is his only comment on the link between the second *Romans* and Expressionism.

New Man', and the latter part headed 'The New World'.[70] The second edition was, of course, written in late 1920 and in 1921, a time when Expressionist poetry and drama had become much better known than they had been during the war. Whether Barth was deliberately choosing a vocabulary which recalled Expressionism is uncertain; but the adoption of such language undoubtedly makes a major contribution to the rhetorical effect of the book.

The turn to a more Expressionistic prose is not just a matter of vocabulary, however. Barth's writing in the second edition generates a different atmosphere from the earlier version, or rather a distinct intensification of its atmosphere. It is not only the content of the second *Romans* that is unlike historical-critical commentaries: its style and mood are utterly different. Reading it is an extraordinary experience by any standards. George Steiner has recently described the book as "an explosive step in the history of the German language", and suggested that in it Barth's style actually goes beyond Expressionism.[71] Certainly the book is characterized by a sense of intensity and excitement which, at very least, is strongly reminiscent of Expressionism. There is, from the very first page, an extraordinary sense of striking through to the heart of the matter, ignoring all incidental detail, sparing no time to set the scene or decorate the situation. There is an effect similar to that noted by Richard Samuel, when he described the contrast between Manet and Marc:[72] the subject matter is thrust into the foreground; Barth's aim is not to present the epistle to the Romans as an object of nature (or religion or ethics or history) but to portray its 'soul', its essential message. The external qualities of Paul's letter - those which keep it at arms length, as a historical object yielding information about religious history - are of no consequence. Barth presses through, insistently, with unwavering concentration, in order to discern and display the true subject matter.

The second edition's popular success and lasting influence were in part due

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[70] The discussion of the chapter concludes with a ringing affirmation: "But because we have perceived this, we are able to recognize ... the power and meaning of the Coming Day: the Day of the New World and of the New Man." *Romans II*, 187.

[71] George Steiner 'To Speak of God', review of Bruce L. McCormack *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19th May 1995, 7.

[72] See Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 146.

to the fact that in it, Barth arrived at a rhetoric which could give appropriate and powerful expression to its central ideas. It did so by means of its concentration on a narrow range of key concepts; by its anxiety-producing dialectical method of statement and counter-statement; even by the repetitiveness that seems to result from the sheer narrowness of its gaze; and all these focussing on the question of "the being which the world has in the thought of God", as Cornelis van der Kooi puts it.[73] The rhetoric conveys a sense of crisis, and to that extent is superbly suited to the content. The sheer concentration of the book gives it an atmosphere reminiscent of the visionary quality of much Expressionist drama; and as is often the case in Expressionist writing, there is a sense that in these visions we have fleetingly, tangentially touched (or been touched by) the truth of how things are for us.

Moving on from questions of language and rhetoric, another feature of the second *Romans* is its appropriation of influences which were also important for Expressionism. The most obvious of these shared influences is Kierkegaard. This was noted by von Balthasar, who went so far as to call the second *Romans* "theological expressionism, especially in methodology". The justification for this appellation was the fact that the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and humanity, so important for the methodology of the second *Romans*, was something which had been "rediscovered in the febrile and tumultuous years following World War I, the era of Expressionism".[74] The importance of the dialectical opposition of time and eternity in the second *Romans* does not need to be stressed; it is central to the work, as Barth admitted in the preface.[75] It is significant, though, that much Expressionism can be understood in terms of a similar dialectic between time and eternity. As noted in chapter 2 above, R. Hinton Thomas went so far as to describe the duality of finite and infinite as the special problem facing Expressionist art.[76] The debt to Kierkegaard, whose writings had only

[73] See Cornelis van der Kooi *Anfängliche Theologie: Der Denkweg des jungen Karl Barth* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1987), 169.

[74] von Balthasar *The Theology of Karl Barth* op. cit. 83.

[75] *Romans II*, 10. I do not wish, or need, to take a view here on the question of the precise importance of Kierkegaard's influence. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 237-40 for a brief discussion of this issue.

[76] Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 23-4.

recently become known in Germany, is obvious. Thomas mentions Kafka's debt to Kierkegaard in particular, while noting that the former gave more significant expression than any other contemporary writer to "the irreconcilable dualism of the Finite and Infinite, of Time and Eternity".[77] The duality Thomas describes, though, was widespread in Expressionism, appearing in a variety of guises: particularly in its apocalyptic notes and in its opposition between the old world and the new, between bourgeois culture and the new man, between the chaos and futility of the passing world and the spiritual realm which can be grasped in an intuitive vision.

Kierkegaard was not the only writer who influenced Barth and was also important for Expressionism. The novels of Dostoevsky had begun to be available in German translation in the early years of the century, and had a profound influence on the new generation of writers, sufficient for R. Hinton Thomas to remark that the whole period was captured by the spell he cast.[78] Barth seems to have been introduced to his novels by Thurneysen, whose admiration of Dostoevsky is documented in his book of 1921.[79] These novels seem to have had a lasting impact on Barth. Barth refers to them in his correspondence with Thurneysen as early as 18th August 1915, when he says that he spent the whole of the previous day reading *Crime and Punishment*. In the second *Romans* he refers to Dostoevsky and his books on numerous occasions.[80] Dostoevsky's value, for Barth and Thurneysen, was his ability to put the stable reality of the familiar everyday world, and the humanity which inhabits it, into question. Thurneysen opened his book by highlighting the disturbing effect of Dostoevsky's narrative. He wrote:

> Whoever comes to Dostoevsky from the regions of secure humanity, of the

[77] Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 140. See Robertson, *Kafka*, 192-5, though, on the extent to which Kafka came to dislike and reject important elements in Kierkegaard. The extent of Kierkegaard's influence on Barth has also been disputed recently, of course.
[78] Ibid. 122. One particularly important instance of Dostoevsky's influence was Kafka. There is a good deal of literature on this; a useful article, including references to other relevant work, is W.J. Dodd's 'Varieties of Influence: On Kafka's Indebtedness to Dostoevskii' in *Journal of European Studies*, xiv (1984), 257-269.
[79] *Dostojewski* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1921). ET: *Dostoevsky* trans. Keith R. Crim, (John Knox Press, Richmond, 1964).
[80] There are in fact some twenty-six occasions when Dostoevsky or his novels are mentioned. Unfortunately the indexes to both the German and the English translation are inaccurate and incomplete. I would estimate, however, that of post-biblical sources only Luther is mentioned more often than Dostoevsky.

> pre-war period for instance, must feel like one who has been looking at such domesticated animals as the dog and the cat, the chicken or the horse, and then suddenly sees the Wild before him, and without warning finds himself face to face with the yet untamed animal world ... He is surrounded by awesome wildness, by strangeness ...[81]

Dostoevsky was felt by him to sum up the restlessness and scepticism of the age. He:

> unites in himself the whole many-sided striving of the European soul at the end of the nineteenth century and holds the mirror up to it. Whoever looks into it reads something of the nameless disquiet, the deep scepticism, the torment and defiance, and the unallayed longing of this unfortunate epoch, which was being driven into the abyss of war and revolution.[82]

Dostoevsky's value is that he puts a question not on the basis of some secure position that he has found, but a question that undermines all that is: "The man Dostoevsky, taken as a whole, is one great, fiery protest against all that exists as such."[83] Yet Thurneysen finds that because of this "absolute critique", Dostoevsky's writing identifies and criticizes with particular accuracy the mood and thought of western bourgeois culture:

> Dostoevsky's thinking has two poles: life as it is, the world as it goes its way, is one, and the beyond, 'resurrection,' eternity, is the other. Here is man, there God. Dostoevsky's total knowledge consists in the strict critical relationship of these two moments to one another, as he portrayed it. But what he does not know—or knows only all too well in its demonic danger!—is that in-between world where man becomes God and the other-world becomes this-worldly, where the dream is dreamed of being like God, of the development of man from 'gorilla to superman'. It is just this idolatrous dream which Dostoevsky saw was being dreamed in the West above all, in the form which is so well known to us, of cultural evolution towards leagues of nations, yes, to the union of all mankind and finally to the automatic arrival of the Kingdom of God and universal peace.[84]

Thurneysen's account of Dostoevsky indicates accurately the value that the latter had for Barth. The understanding of Dostoevsky implied by Barth's references in *Romans* is recognisably related to Thurneysen's picture. Barth talks for example of Dostoevsky's "hunger for eternity"[85] and of his

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81 Thurneysen, *Dostoevsky*, 7.
82 Ibid. 10.
83 Ibid. 77.
84 Ibid. 82.
85 *Romans II*, 252.

presentation of "the impenetrable ambiguity of human life".[86] The ends of Dostoevsky's novels, he says, parallel the end of Paul's letter to the Romans.[87] What he means by this is that Dostoevsky's 'absolute critique' is grounded in a perception of the 'universal *Krisis*'. This close parallel between the Barth and Thurneysen's reading of Dostoevsky is, though, hardly surprising. What is less expected, perhaps, is that Thurneysen's book also reflects accurately Dostoevsky's value for the whole generation of writers. That value is said by Thomas to have lain primarily in his "eschatological vision of world-destruction", an "impressive vision of the collapse of mankind"[88] - this is the very quality which Thurneysen described as Dostoevsky's 'absolute critique'. Thomas notes that the highest expression of this among all Dostoevsky's novels is *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is worth noting that in the second *Romans*, almost all of the references to Dostoevsky which mention a particular novel relate to *The Brothers Karamazov*.[89]

viii. Expressionism and the second *Romans*: divergence

So far, in discussing style and influences, I have touched only slightly on the relation between Expressionism and the theological ideas in the second *Romans*. Are the connections considered above, matters of common influences and of style and vocabulary, reflected in the book's theological content? Is the 'theological Expressionism' of the second edition more than skin deep? At first sight it might appear as if a retreat from modernism had taken place. I have argued, after all, that the most important connection between the first *Romans* and Expressionism was their common substitution of process for substance. But in the second *Romans* process eschatology has been displaced by consistent eschatology. What is to be made of this? Is the change to be regarded as a step away from the influence of the *Zeitgeist* towards a purer theological expression of Barth's ideas? Or does the shift in perspective between the two editions perhaps reflect a parallel change in

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86 *Romans II*, 505.

87 Ibid. 505.

88 Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism*, 121.

89 To be precise, there are eleven references to *The Brothers Karamazov*, one to *The Idiot*, and one to *Crime and Punishment*. Most of the references to *The Brothers Karamazov* are to the Grand Inquisitor episode.

culture and society? I want to deal with this in two stages: first of all I will consider the ways in which Barth's theological perspective, particularly in the second *Romans*, distinguishes his work from Expressionism and from modernist culture generally. After that I will consider the positive analogies between the theology of the second *Romans* and the post-War history of Expressionism.

To begin with, it has been noted earlier that Expressionism's assumptions and commitments were not compatible with traditional religious belief. It would in fact be impossible to talk usefully about similarities between Barth and Expressionism were it not for the element of anti-theology in his writing, his denial of the possibility of human speech about God. However his writing was not simply anti-theology: it was also theology, a speaking about God despite itself, claiming a basis in God's address to the creature. Any discussion of affinities between Barth and Expressionism appears to be in difficulties as soon as this side of the matter comes into view. The critical thing here is the question of the nature of the basis of the positive side, the element which grounds Barth's transcendence of theological nihilism: in other words Barth's inversion of neo-Kantianism, his location of originatory thought not in the human *konstruktive Geist* but in God. For Barth it was not human creativity or decision that matter, but God's decision and act. This tendency had been present in his thinking since well before the war. Even in 1910, speaking of the intuition in which faith is united with God's act of justification, he described this as "God's deed of election".[90] By 1913 this thought had become clearer: "Religion's thinking about God cannot be something projected from within ourselves; it can only be the reflection of a fact that has been created and projected into us."[91] When the mediation of religious experience is no longer assumed, Barth's thinking is clearly differentiated from Expressionist subjectivism: despite Kant's demolition of the possibility of metaphysics, it is God's creative action, God's act of election that grounds our reality and our knowledge.

There is, at very least, a considerable divergence between Barthian theology and Expressionism here. Expressionism's visions, whether of inner states or

[90] Barth, *CGG*, 53.
[91] Barth, *GPG*, 89.

social renewal, were typically visions of human creativity. Despite its sense of the otherness of the future, the source of the new world and the new humanity was to be the transfigured old humanity, not a power that broke into world from without. The gulf it sensed between the old world and the new was not therefore of the same order as the *diastasis* between the two worlds in Barth's thought. Expressionism thought in terms of a gulf between human actuality and human possibility, even if the realization of human possibilities would require a profound *Wandlung* of the individual to take place. But Barth thought in terms of a gulf between human actuality and *divine* possibility, which is human *im*possibility. In this sense, perhaps, George Steiner is correct to say that Expressionism falls short of Barth.[92] The *diastasis* between the human and the divine, especially in the second *Romans*, was of a different order than the Expressionist gulf between the finite and the infinite. Barth's visions could not be visions of eternity. As he said: "The vision of the New Day remains an indirect vision; in Jesus revelation is a paradox, however objective and universal it may be."[93]

Does Barth's theology, then, for all its analogies with Expressionism, amount to a thorough rejection of modernist assumptions and convictions? Was his 'Expressionism', like Werfel's, a search rather than a destination? Is his modernism, located particularly in his insistence on the complete inability of human language to represent God, ultimately incompatible with his theological realism and his stress on God's decision and address? Do the latter notions not ultimately subvert modernism's emphasis on ephemerality and contingency? Does the idea of God's revelatory address not provide a positive grounding for judgements of truth and value, and for renewed confidence in the mimetic power of language? These questions, arising from the genuine divergence between Barth's theological ideas and the ideas animating modernist culture, reaffirm the doubt about whether the Expressionism of the second *Romans* goes any deeper than the surface of the book. They are questions, though; and they are not rhetorical. Any answer that did not consider the relation between the post-War development of Barth's theology and the development of Expressionism in the same period would be premature. Before concluding that the second *Romans* was a

[92] George Steiner *To Speak of God* op. cit.
[93] *Romans II*, 97.

retreat from Expressionism, it is advisable to consider seriously the possibility that it constituted a parallel reaction to essentially the same set of circumstances as faced post-War Expressionism: disappointment in the failure to achieve some meaningful social reconstruction, and a consequent reinterpretation of hope.

ix. Expressionism and the second *Romans*: convergence

Michael Beintker describes Barth's development between the two editions of *Romans* in the following terms: "Under the sign of eschatology, an everywhere tangible de-historicization of the salvation event was carried out in *Romans* II ... Herein lies the real break between the two commentaries on *Romans*".[94] The 'process' eschatology of the first edition, to use McCormack's terms, was displaced by "a radically futurist 'consistent' eschatology according to which the Kingdom of God is understood as that which brings about 'the dissolution of all things, the cessation of all becoming, the passing away of this world's time'."[95] It is important, as McCormack stresses, that the development between the two editions did not consist in the *introduction* of eschatology, let alone in the emergence of dialectical thinking. Rather it consisted in a *change* in the character of Barth's eschatology, from one which conceived of the world of God as this world made new, and as growing organically within this world, to an eschatology which pushed the *eschaton* radically into the future, so radically in fact that as he later admitted, it became a moment which "never has 'come' and never will 'come'."[96]

In its recoil from activism after 1918, Expressionism also developed in a way that can be described as a change in its eschatology, a displacement of the *eschaton* from the present world into a distant future.[97] Georg Kaiser's *Gas I*

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[94] Beintker *Die Dialektik in der 'dialektischen Theologie' Karl Barths* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich, 1987), 44, quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 209.

[95] McCormack ibid. 208.

[96] *CD* II/1, 635. Barth admitted that the second *Romans* had been guilty of one-sidedness in its "reduction of the eternity of God to the denominator of post-temporality". (*CD* II/1, 634.)

[97] Richard Roberts notes the widespread eschatological mood of the early Weimar years, consistent with this development. See "Barth and the Eschatology of Weimar: a Theology on its Way?" in Roberts op. cit. 169-199.

of 1918 is an early, though rather superficial, example of this response to disillusionment by the postponement of hope. It represents a point at which optimism has been challenged but "remains unchanged in essence". Activism's hope is postponed but not essentially modified. Its vision "is simply projected into a more propitious future".[98] Toller's *Masse-Mensch*, as noted earlier, contains rather more of a modification of the activist hope, prompting Sokel's talk of a second *Wandlung*, supplementing and crowning the first. The second *Wandlung* rejects the messianic conviction of the Expressionists that they could actively usher in the new world. The play still places its faith in the new community which "will come into being some day, when the violent bitterness of mass man will have given way to sympathy and love". That day, however, "has been moved into a vague and distant future. It will not be here tomorrow. Infinite patience is necessary."[99]

There is a clear analogy between the postponement of hope to a distant future in such plays and the change in Barth's eschatology between 1918 and 1920. To this extent, the development in Barth's thinking was consistent with a much wider trend, connected with disappointments in the political and social upheavals which followed the end of the War. It is important, in this context, to realize that these upheavals extended beyond the boundaries of post-revolution Russia and post-War Germany. Bruce McCormack gives an excellent summary of events in Switzerland around the end of the War, and illustrates how Swiss socialists such as Barth had cause to be disappointed not only in the failure of the German 'November Revolution' but also at events in their own land. Of particular relevance here was the struggle that resulted in the Swiss Landesstreik of November 1918. Following Christine Nöthiger-Strahm,[100] McCormack notes the traditional moderation of Swiss Socialism, but also its radicalization during the War as a result of oppressive measures taken by the Swiss Government. The tension between the state and workers came to a head in the call by the Olten Action Committee for a nationwide mass strike from 12th November 1918. The strike lasted until 14th November, when it was called off by the organizers

[98] Sokel, *WE*, 194.
[99] Ibid. 199.
[100] Christine Nöthiger-Strahm *Der Deutschschweizerische Protestantismus und der Landesstreik von 1918: Die Auseinandersetzung der Kirche mit der sozialen Frage zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Peter Lang, Bern, 1981).

despite the government's refusal to concede any of its demands. Its aim had not been revolutionary; it was an attempt to protest against social injustice, and to force the adoption of programmes of social renewal which would alleviate the plight of the working classes.

McCormack notes Barth and Thurneysen's comments on the political situation in their correspondence: they affirm the importance of the 'otherness' of the Kingdom of God, and the consequent need to keep their hope distinct from "all democratic and other 'preliminary stages'."[101] But equally they sought some sign of the 'organic connection' between this world and God's. As Barth wrote on 11th November:

> If only we had turned to the bible sooner, so that we might now have firm ground beneath our feet! Now one broods alternately over the newspaper and the New Testament and sees precious little of the organic connection between the two worlds, of which one ought now to be able to give clear and powerful testimony.[102]

Positive comments in the correspondence between Barth and Thurneysen tend to come from the latter. Thurneysen suggested in his sermon the following Sunday that the right way to interpret the upheavals of Switzerland and of Germany and Russia was to see in them a reflection of a deep longing for a new world, implanted in peoples' hearts by God. This was not to identify the cause of the workers with the cause of God, but it was to see a real connection. There is no indication in Barth's letters, though, that he felt able to see even this connection. As for the two men's attitudes to the Swiss struggle in particular, Thurneysen's letters hope for "fruits of righteousness", though without giving religious approval to the striking workers. He wrote that the "saddest thing of all" would be if the upheavals did not produce such fruits;[103] this, of course, was precisely what happened.

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101 Thurneysen to Barth, 30th October 1918. See *B-Th. Br. I.* 299. Quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 188.

102 *B-Th. Br. I.* 300. Quoted by McCormack, ibid. 188. This quotation, incidentally, seems to me to provide all the proof one could ask for that there was a difference of substance between Barth's eschatology at this point and the eschatology of the second *Romans*. The 'organological conceptuality' was clearly more than an ill-chosen rhetorical scheme. This quotation is also, of course, evidence of the fact that socio-political events were exerting significant pressure on this conceptuality.

103 See McCormack, *CRDT*, 189.

What is clear in all this is that Switzerland, despite its neutrality during the War and its relative stability afterwards, was not completely insulated from the social and political turmoil of central Europe provoked by the War and the manner of its end. The hopes and disappointments experienced by Swiss socialists display striking analogies to those of their German counterparts at precisely the same moment. Moreover Barth, a German-speaking Swiss who had lived, studied and worked in Germany before the War, and who spent the war years living only some fifteen miles from the border, would inevitably have had some interest in the events in Germany. McCormack has noted his critical comment on the Weimar republic in August 1919: that it represented a "watered-down" version of socialism.[104] Barth clearly shared the common judgement of those who had cherished high hopes for reconstruction after the War, a judgement about the failure of the German revolution to attain something decisively better than the old regime.

It ought to be noted here that Bruce McCormack seeks to minimize the importance of contextual factors on Barth's development, despite his valuable discussion of this material. He writes:

> the political upheavals of 1918 and 1919 and their consequences were at most *a* contributing factor in leading to Barth's further development. More decisive was his reaction to reviews of his commentary (which showed him how easily his organological model of eschatology could be misunderstood) and the influence ... of Franz Overbeck, Heinrich Barth and Søren Kierkegaard.[105]

I cannot agree that factors such as the misreading of the first edition by reviewers are more decisive than the political and cultural factors mentioned above.[106] To give prominence to Barth's desire to avoid misunderstanding risks implying that both process eschatology and consistent eschatology were essentially rhetorical devices, adopted to

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[104] McCormack, *CRDT*, 194.

[105] Ibid. 203.

[106] See ibid. 181 for details of these reviews. Chief among them was Brunner's. The striking thing about all these 'misreadings' is that they took Barth to be advocating views close to those which he had in fact advocated before 1915. This could, to some extent, have resulted from the familiarity of these readers with Barth's earlier views, and their having read his new work with expectations derived from his earlier work. However it could also have been caused by the fact that Barth's text failed to break as decisively as he thought with his earlier Herrmannism.

facilitate the communication of an unchanging message. This would be a great over-simplification. While the changes between the two editions of *Romans* should not be overstated, they were real. McCormack's argument here is in danger of trivializing them. Secondly, there are problems surrounding Barth's reception of the influences mentioned: for example his interpretation of Overbeck is often seen as anachronistic, to say the least;[107] and recent assessments of Kierkegaard's influence have tended to minimize its importance.[108] Even without these doubts, though, and granting the full significance of these influences, there remains a question as to why Barth was susceptible to precisely these influences at that particular time.

I would suggest, then, that McCormack's attempt to minimize socio-political factors is flawed. It gives insufficient weight to Barth's frustration at being unable to discern a connection between the events of the times and the Kingdom of God. Barth's theology already employed the idea of a *diastasis* between the divine and the human realms; it also, though, thought in terms of a relation between the two worlds, a turning from the old to the new world, discernible to faith. The end of the War and its aftermath put this relation in question: instead of the fulfilment of hopes it seemed to imply the permanent frustration of hopes for an organic growth of the new in the midst of the old. Hopes for renewal had been sustainable during the War, since there was the prospect of a better world afterwards; but disappointment in the post-War period left many without hope of something significantly different and better. In such circumstances it is understandable that Barth should reject his previous view of an organic connection between the two worlds, and therefore that his theology would place greater stress on the remaining element, the *diastasis* motif.

To this extent, I would argue, the shift in Barth's eschatology is analogous to the recoil from activism in Expressionists like Toller. This claim has to be handled carefully, however, for Barth had never been committed to

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[107] McCormack himself admits that Barth's interpretation of Overbeck was "certainly tendentious", and he notes Jüngel's view that Barth's reading rested on a "grotesque misunderstanding". See ibid. 227.

[108] See Beintker op. cit. 233 f.

anything like the activism of the first *Wandlung*. As I have already made clear, his location of originary thought in God places him in opposition to the Expressionist visualization of inner realities, and to the activist vision of social renewal, both of which presuppose the constructive *human* spirit. The *diastasis* between this world and the world of God is not ultimately commensurable with the Expressionist gulf between old and new humanity. It is important to note, though, that Barth had at one time stood very close not to Expressionist activism but to the Religious Socialist activism of Leonhard Ragaz. His adherence to Ragaz had never been complete nor uncritical; yet as noted earlier, in the early months of the War Barth had felt himself closer to Ragaz's position than Kutter's.[109]

Barth's subsequent development can be seen as a series of steps away from this position. The first *Romans* had turned firmly against this activism, taking a very negative view of the practical political possibilities available in this world. Yet the distance between the first *Romans* and Religious Socialist activism was limited by Barth's notion of the Kingdom of God growing within this world, making this world new. A greater distance is discernible in the Tambach lecture, even though it did not really break with the eschatology of the first *Romans*. The emphasis in this lecture on the gulf between the Christian and society made the rejection of activism much more obvious than it had been before, sufficient for Busch to describe that lecture as Barth's farewell to Religious Socialism.[110] Even at Tambach, then, Barth could be said to have been on the same path as those participating in the Expressionist recoil from activism. His critique in that lecture of the idea of the ecclesiastical reconstruction of society has close affinities with the late Expressionist critique of the idea of the artistic reconstruction of society. What came after the Tambach lecture, though, Barth's turn from process eschatology to consistent eschatology, constituted a genuine and more radical change, an abandonment of attempts to perceive an organic connection between this world and God's, and therefore a projection of hope

[109] McCormack, *CRDT*, 121.
[110] Busch, *Karl Barth* op. cit. 111.

into a distant future.[111]

Where do things stand, then, with the comparison between post-War Expressionism and the theological ideas involved in the turn from process to consistent eschatology? I would suggest that Barth's development should not be seen as a simple turn away from modernism but as a development analogous to the developments in late Expressionism. The futurist eschatology is not a retreat from the modernist turn from substance to process, but a development of it. It widens the gulf between the processes of dissolution and renewal, such that the former are exposed in an even starker light than before. This is particularly clear in the dissolution of the centred subject that takes place in the second *Romans*. Richard Roberts describes this as

> the displacement of the relatively secure, contemplative subject in the first *Römerbrief* and its replacement by a striving negative space in the second; this is what may be justifiably regarded as a deconstruction *avant la lettre* of the ontology of the subject.[112]

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111 It is perhaps necessary to comment here on McCormack's observations about possible connections between Barth and the 'anti-historical revolution' in this period, particularly as described by the historian Kurt Nowak. See McCormack, *CRDT*, 233-5, where he disputes any such connection, at least without "some weighty qualifications". Having said this, though, and having argued against this connection, he goes on to make the following admission: "On a subterranean level, there was undoubtedly *some* connection between Barth's theology and the figures and movements associated with the 'anti-historical revolution'." What troubles me here is the word 'subterranean'. It seems to imply that any connections between Barth's thought and cultural trends such as an 'anti-historical revolution' are somehow inaccessible to any kind of critical evaluation and discussion. Why this should be so is not made clear, however. The adjective 'subterranean' in fact crops up several times when McCormack purports to be considering the relation between Barth's thought and its context. (See also p. 32, mentioned below, and p. 140.) On each occasion it seems to foreclose further discussion of the extent of any parallels, their nature, and their significance. This approach seems to me to undermine McCormack's appearance of offering an account of Barth's development which includes an assessment of the influence of political, social and cultural factors (an impression fostered by his inclusion of a brief discussion of Expressionism on the third page of his Chapter 1). McCormack therefore fails to justify or explain his early claim (on p. 32-3) that "the best single introduction" to Barth's theology is his anti-bourgeois sigh, the roots of which are to be found "in the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War, in the subterranean currents of the counter-culture which was beginning to emerge", and which was embodied in socialism, in the youth movements, and, "most eloquently", in Expressionism. Again the adjective 'subterranean' is presumably the key. He does, on p. 235, offer a reason for not exploring such analogies in any detail: attempts to specify such connections seem "invariably to overlook some one aspect of differentiation which makes comparisons difficult." I am not convinced; but even if this is granted, it provides no reason to avoid the task; rather, it ought to encourage a more careful treatment of the subject, avoiding such pitfalls.

112 Roberts op. cit. 191-2.

As Sokel pointed out, there is a strong 'antipersonalism' in the transition from substance to process: "The idea of individual personality has meaning in a world of substances; it is meaningless in a universe of pure function and process. Personality, in the Goethean sense, exists in and for itself; it exercises no function beyond that of being itself."[113] The eschatology of the second *Romans,* placing the subject under an absolute critique, extends, rather than retreats from, the modernism of the first edition.

x. Barth's later criticism of the second *Romans*

Barth's use of consistent eschatology turned out to be a passing phase in his theological development, however. One perspective on the reasons for this is given in his later critique of the second *Romans*, in volume II/1 of the *Church Dogmatics*. Speaking of the concept of eternity, he notes that in his own earlier stress on eternity as post-temporality, he ended up with something very close to the Neo-Protestant emphasis on eternity as supra-temporality. He wrote:

> It is clear that I did say there things which can and have to be said at the periphery if Rom. 13:11 f. is to be correctly understood. But it is also clear that with all this art and eloquence I missed the distinctive feature of the passage, the teleology which it ascribes to time as it moves towards a real end. Above all, it is clear and astonishing that that in my exposition the one thing which continues to hold the field as something tangible is the one-sided supra-temporal understanding of God which I had set out to combat. ... while I had radically disturbed the optimism of the Neo-Protestant conception of time in itself it had really been confirmed by the extreme form it had been given by me.[114]

The future into which eternity was pushed was, he admits, so radical that it bore no relation to any future in time. Therefore: "The 'last' hour, the time of eternity, was not an hour which followed time. Rather at every moment in time we stood before the frontier of all time, the frontier of 'qualified time'."[115] This distortion was necessary as a correction to the Immanentism of the previous period, but it was equally unbalanced. It was unstable, and

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[113] Sokel, *WE*, 117.
[114] *CD* II/1, 635.
[115] Ibid. 635.

could last for long. "It could not actually be the 'theology of crisis' for more than a moment."[116] What is interesting, though, is that Barth had, a few pages prior to these remarks, commented on the cheapening of the notion of eternity that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He wrote:

> In a really distressing way ... the concept of eternity had lost in depth and perspective, so that finally the point was reached where the assertion of it was hardly to be distinguished from the denial of its contents. In the last resort ... it became little more than an exclamation mark which had no positive content, so that it could be placed not only behind the word 'God' but behind any word at all denoting a supreme value, even in the last analysis, as we have seen under National Socialism, behind the word 'Germany'.[117]

These remarks undoubtedly apply to Expressionism, which did tend to use religious imagery, the idea of eternity in particular, to denote its supreme values. The postponement of Expressionist hopes into a distant future did not break with this. Immanentism and supra-temporalism are still present even in the Expressionism of the second *Wandlung*: the central character of *Masse-Mensch* continues to use the language of eternity.[118] But what is significant is that in so far as Barth's idea of eternity in the second *Romans* was one sided, and approximated to the supra-temporality of the Neo-Protestants, his criticisms have some application to his own earlier view. Though Barth did not make this implication explicit, he would presumably have accepted that the eschatology of the second *Romans* was also guilty of a cheapening of the idea of eternity, guilty of a tendency to use it to denote its supreme value, attributed to the idea of crisis. I would suggest, then, that Barth's later critique of the second *Romans* supports my account above. It should not be thought that the eschatology of the second *Romans* placed it in a different category from the postponement of Expressionism's hopes. As Barth himself later admitted, the fault of that eschatology had been that it did *not* constitute a fundamental break with the supra-temporalism of post-Enlightenment theology and culture.

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116 *CD* II/1, 636.

117 Ibid. 632-3.

118 The Woman says: "You live today; tomorrow you will die. But I – turning and circling – I come into being eternally. I shall become cleaner, more guiltless, I shall become Mankind." Quoted by Sokel, *WE*, 200.

What his theology lacked, in the second *Romans*, was sufficient attention to the dimension of pre-temporality that had been the characteristic emphasis of the reformers. His theology had within it the basis for its own correction here: the latent idea of the decision of God as the ground of our being, our knowledge, and our language about God. Barth's later criticism is accurate in its recognition that the dialectical method of the second *Romans* did not allow this idea to play the rôle it ought to. The earliest occurrence of this recognition, though, as I have argued in Chapter 1 above, was the Elgersburg lecture of October 1922, where he began to see the value of "a simple direct word of faith and humility".[119]

xi. The recoil: Barth, Expressionism and community

Just as the eschatology of the second *Romans* was unstable, and could not last in that form "for more than a moment", the second *Wandlung* was an unstable response to the disappointments the immediate post-war situation. Toller's postponed optimism was an attempt to fend off a despair which broke through in these other places.[120] The instability of Toller's postponed hope, though, resulted from its abstractness. A number of works avoided this by locating their hopes in some more concrete institution or ideal. In *Platz*, Unruh envisaged an elevation, in place of the 'new man', of the concrete relationships of marriage and family life. Likewise Brod's *Das grosse Wagnis* opposed Expressionist utopianism with an elevation of the individual's ability to love, related to a specific form of human community - this time the national-political hopes of Zionism.[121]

Barth's new interest in the possibility of "a simple direct word of faith and humility" has similarities with this trend. It represents an attempt to make hope concrete rather than abstract, the future of God related to a future in time. It involved a new appreciation of the relation of hope to the life of a particular human community - the community of the Church. It involved a

119 Barth, *WGWM*, 212.

120 See Sokel, *WE*, 200-1 and above p. ?

121 The connection of hope not only to community but to a community with some sort of historical continuity or tradition is particularly clear in Werfel's *Spiegelmensch* trilogy. See Sokel, *WE*, 217.

new understanding of the way that speech about eternity is rooted in the life of a community and a tradition.[122] This becomes clear in Barth's Göttingen dogmatics lectures, of 1924. From their first page, it is emphasized that theological discourse is bound to the speech of a particular community, as reflection on the Word of God "proclaimed and heard in Christian preaching".[123]

Despite these not inconsiderable similarities, however, there is a deep disjunction between Barth's turn to dogmatics and the Expressionist turn towards *Sachlichkeit*.[124] It is a consequence of the gradual but now decisive rise to prominence in Barth's thinking of the idea of the originary decision and action of God. Theology may be bound to a particular community as a reflection on its speech, but it is not *simply* reflection on the speech of a

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[122] Note here Bruce McCormack's emphasis in his 1989 thesis on the fact that Barth's dogmatics, from 1924 onwards, was 'school dogmatics', relating itself to the Reformed orthodoxy that flourished in the seventeenth century. On this account McCormack describes Barth's Göttingen dogmatics as a sentence commentary on Heinrich Heppe's textbook of Reformed dogmatics. (This judgement is repeated, though not developed, in his published account - see McCormack, *CRDT*, 349. The material in Chapter 6 of his thesis which dealt with this will presumably bear fruit in the book which McCormack promises as a second volume supplementing the present one. See ibid. vii.) It was in fact Barth's 'scholasticism' that McCormack described as the main object of study in his thesis, and in virtue of which he arrived at the title for it. See McCormack *A Scholastic of a Higher Order* op. cit., passim, and especially 1-15 and 558-663. See also Barth's statement in the introduction to his Göttingen lectures (*GD*, op. cit. 4) that dogmatics requires as a background "the presence of a Christian church that we do not have to build or support but that edifies and supports us". See also *GD*, 27, where Barth says that he wants to restore the connection between dogmatics today and dogmatic history.

[123] Barth, *GD*, 3.

[124] This is perhaps an appropriate point at which to note that constrictions of space prevent any detailed consideration of the relation between Barth's turn to dogmatics and the emergence, during the mid-1920s, of the tendency in German culture known as *neue Sachlichkeit*. McCormack says that any suggestion of a connection here is unacceptable because "Barth displayed little interest at this time in contemporary art" (*CRDT*, 330). This point is surely irrelevant, though, unless one wished to argue that Barth was *directly* influenced by an acquaintance with this art. To say that *only* direct influences are of any interest would be to impose arbitrary restrictions on discussion of Barth's relation to his context. McCormack further notes the judgement of historians that *neue Sachlichkeit* was essentially a reactionary tendency, an accommodation to the status quo. This may well be so; conclusions about Barth's relation to (or lack of relation to) such tendencies should not be drawn too quickly, though. R.C. Speirs notes that the term *'neue Sachlichkeit'* is "awkward and confusing, since everyone wanted to describe his own attitude as 'sachlich', but different individuals and groups meant quite different things by it." (Bance op. cit. 143.) As this implies, the desire for *Sachlichkeit* was widespread. Sokel notes this also (see p. 220), and points to a long-standing tradition of *Sachlichkeit* in German literature, in which Goethe is the most significant figure. He compares late Expressionism's 'ethos of limitation' with "the practical and socially conscious 'ethos of renunciation' of the old Goethe".

human community. The object of dogmatics is the Word of God. Theology concerns itself not with God as such - this would be a pre-Kantian confusion of metaphysics and theology; nor is it essentially a reflection on human religious speech or consciousness - this would be the error of Protestantism from the 17th century onwards. It is grounded in the *Deus dixit*. Barth even affirms the idea of a correlation of God and faith, so long as this is understood in terms in God's address.[125] The notion of such a correlation does not, Barth observes, necessarily involve the reversal of the divine and human subjects. But in practice this had been the consequence. The error of modern theology had not been to talk in terms of a correlation between God and faith but to reverse the places of the divine and human subjects in this correlation. Barth, on the basis of the *Deus dixit*, turns the wheel back round again, reversing this reversal.

Barth's understanding of theology, as outlined at the beginning of his first dogmatics lectures, envisages a more ambiguous relation between the 'intellectual' and the community than the Expressionists who adopted the "ethos of limitation"[126] and attached themselves to particular movements. Neither Johst's Nazism nor Becher's Communism, nor even Werfel's populism, retained any serious critical reservation from the communities in which they pursued their future careers. Barth's venture into dogmatic theology, by contrast, retained a critical distance, an 'eschatological' or 'final' reserve.[127] This takes effect via his insistence that it is the Word of God in preaching that is the object of dogmatics. Dogma and dogmatics have a judicial function over against preaching: they "tell us what will do and what will not do, what we may say and what we may not say if what we say is to be Christian preaching."[128] But this is only one side of the relation. For dogmatics is *itself* grounded in the Word of God, which is to say that it is under the judgement of that Word. It has no secure vantage point from which to carry out its own judgement. It is threatened. Its "dignity, significance and role are derived".[129] This two fold relation of

125 See Barth, *GD*, 10-11.

126 The phrase was coined by Hans Johst - see Sokel, *WE*, 218.

127 The former term is that used by McCormack. The latter is used in the English translation of the Göttingen Dogmatics - see Barth, *GD*, 17.

128 Ibid. 18.

129 Ibid. 17.

preaching to dogmatics reflects the fact that Barth's turn to dogmatic form, while representing in a sense the rehabilitation of preaching and theology into a community and a tradition, is far from being an uncritical submission to the concrete authority of tradition or Church.

All this is emphasized in Barth's comments on the authority of the church in section 9 of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. His view is summarized well in the thesis which he placed at the head of the section:

> That God's Word speaks to us in scripture is first conditioned historically by the authority of the church. The scope and form in which the witness of the prophets and apostles comes to us, the interpretation which it is given by individual teachers and the church's universal doctrinal church definitions, and finally the outer and inner situation of each historical moment — all these things are factors which necessarily determine our hearing of the Word. Nevertheless, this authority is historical, relative and formal. It is reserved exclusively for scripture as God's Word to secure for itself direct, absolute, material authority.[130]

A recognition of the church's authority is essential. It is the church which determines which writings are scripture, the precise text of those writings, and the fundamental points of the interpretation of such scripture. Without a recognition of the authority of the church in these things there could be no Word of God in scripture and therefore no hearing of God's Word in preaching. The other side of this coin, though, is that the church's authority is not absolute. Critical distance is not extinguished. The church and its teaching ought not to be accepted without reservation. On the contrary church authority is historical and relative. It is itself under the criticism of the Word which it proclaims. Its authority "is a real one ... But it is a real one, we now conclude, in *brackets*, and these brackets must not be excised."[131] There is a higher authority standing over the church's authority, one which constitutes "a crisis of the crisis, a norm by which all norms are measured and must let themselves be measured."[132] There is, in fact, a dialectical relation of authority and freedom, something which Barth believed the reformers to have affirmed. He quoted Luther's famous affirmation in "The Freedom of a Christian Man" in support: "A Christian is

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[130] Barth, *GD*, 227.
[131] Ibid. 245.
[132] Ibid. 246.

a free lord of all things and subject to none, a Christian is a servant of all things and subject to all."[133]

This further development beyond the second *Romans*, though, brings us back to the question of the relation between Barth's thought and modernism. Does the further rise to prominence of the idea of divine decision, the divine ground of being and knowledge, signal the collapse of the heady modernism of his commentaries? I would suggest that it doesn't. The key thing to note is his insistence on a dialectical relation between freedom and authority, and his consequent affirmation of church authority as a 'bracketed' authority. His turn to dogmatic method, and to a recognition of the authority of the particular community of the church and its teaching, does not constitute an abandonment of the modernist and Expressionist impulses identified in his earlier work. The 'absolute crisis' has not been revoked; God's Yes does not mean that God's No is no longer uttered. Barth's 'dogmatics under crisis' is an attempt to relate the dual impulses of Expressionism dialectically, and so preserve both. He offers dogmatics as a sustainable form of speech, sustainable because it is both rooted in and directed to the life of an existing historical community. Yet this speech knows that it is relative and historical, always undergoing dissolution, unable to speak the truth by its own power. Whether Barth's subsequent, lifelong theological endeavours succeeded in maintaining this dialectic is another matter altogether, and beyond the scope of this study. But in its conception, Barth's advocacy of a dogmatics bound to a particular tradition of speech and embodied in an actual community is an attempt to fashion an authentically modern theology: genuinely modern, but also genuinely a speaking of God.

xii. Dialectical 'solutions': Barth and Kafka.

Nowhere does twentieth century literature come closer to Barth than in the stories and aphorisms of Kafka. The parallels are many. First of all, Kafka, more than any other writer connected with Expressionism, took the problem of human estrangement from truth seriously, sufficiently so that he

[133] See Barth, *GD*, 252.

approaches Barth's notion of the *diastasis* between the old and new worlds. One of the dominant ideas of his early writing (for example *Das Urteil* and *Der Prozeß*) was the conviction that the truth we are estranged from is an absolute justice which condemns us. Significantly, it was in precisely the same period that Barth's sermons were beginning to show an unusual emphasis on divine judgement, an emphasis that was to develop into the *Krisis* motif of the second *Romans*. Barth's admiration, expressed in the latter work, for Dostoevsky's 'absolute critique' could perhaps have been extended also to Kafka's stories, had he known them.

Even when Kafka begins to think in terms of 'das Unzerstörbare' as the basis of life, the estrangement of consciousness from being is just as firmly maintained. The condemnation is still present, only it is no longer the last, or the only, word. The transcendent truth we are estranged from also seems to be the ground of our existence. There is something of this in *Das Schloß*, in the fact that the Castle not only legislates for the village but, in a great variety of ways, is the source and sustenance of its life. It is also present perhaps in the squeaking of Josefine, which has a unique role in the life of the mouse-people, especially in their moments of need. Her singing may not, as her supporters claim, actually save the people or give them any strength, but nonetheless she is listened to at these times, and she "achieves effects that a true singer would seek in vain to achieve with us".[134] Her song touches the people as no other squeaking ever does; they find that "it is as if the limbs of each were loosened, as if each single, anxious individual were allowed for once to stretch out and relax to his heart's content in the great warm bed of the people."[135] In Josefine's song, somehow, the people's squeaking "is freed from the fetters of everyday life and can free us from them, too, for a little while."[136]

Kafka and Barth are also at one in maintaining that our estrangement from truth cannot be overcome either by religion or by our striving after transcendence. Ritchie Robertson suggests that Kafka viewed religion as a form of estrangement from being. Yet he did not on that account regard

134 *The Transformation and Other Stories*, 227.
135 Ibid. 230.
136 Ibid. 230.

religion as an illusion. After all it is not only religion that is estranged from being: all of consciousness suffers the same condition. The important thing is that while religious language and imagery may be useful, they are not adequate to truth.[137] The Castle, which symbolizes the transcendent realm, is described at the start of *Das Schloß* partly by contrast with the church spire in K.'s home town. Unlike that spire, the Castle only seemed distinct from a distance. Closer up it seemed ramshackle and in decay, and there was no clear division between church and town, sacred and secular. Like the decaying punishment machine in *In der Strafkolonie*, Robertson points out, the transcendent is symbolized in a way which also suggests the decay of religion and its traditional symbolism and language. All of this reflects very closely Barth's theology in which there can no longer be any attempt to fence off a realm of religion and religious knowledge, impervious to criticism; in which religion is part of the old world, under judgement, suffering dissolution, valuable only because and when it points beyond itself, to that which is genuinely transcendent.

A closely connected thought of Barth's is his insistence that to attempt to encounter transcendence is futile, and, worse than that, a fundamental transgression: "When men stretch out their hands and touch the link which binds them to God, when they touch the tree in the midst of the garden, which ought not to be touched, they are by this presumptuous contact separated from Him."[138] This is very similar to Kafka's view of attempts to encounter transcendence. The most important example, of course, is K.'s repeated attempts to meet Klamm and to enter the Castle. Simply to have chosen to attempt such encounters is, as described in the chapter 2, to have chosen the wrong path. K.'s attempt to meet Klamm in the courtyard of the Herrenhof, for example, simply results in what seems to K. at the time to be the Castle's breaking off all relations with him.[139]

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137 Robertson says (p. 241): "Religion is not an illusion, as Freud thought, since for Kafka the religious impulse is essential to humanity; but it must always be under an illusion. Hence the imagery of religion is valid as the expression of the religious impulse, but misleading as an interpretation of this impulse."

138 *Romans II*, 247-8.

139 *The Castle*, 105. See also the following aphorism: "The crows maintain that a single crow could destroy the heavens. There is no doubt of that, but it proves nothing against the heavens, for heaven simply means: the impossibility of crows." (*The Great Wall of China*, 84.) The name Kafka, though German, is also the Czech word for crow.

Kafka and Barth sought the same thing: a mode of discourse and life which knows the inaccessibility of truth and yet is not thereby reduced to silence and isolation. Both realised the futility of striving after the transcendent, and realised that any solution must involve connection to a real community of speech and life. Yet such a solution must remain dialectical, a recognition of the gulf between consciousness and being, the human and the divine. Neither the feeble squeaking of Josefine nor the dogmatics of the confessional theologian can attain unconditional truth.

To say all this, though, is not to try to enrol Kafka as a Barthian, even a deviant one. He was a Jew, who felt himself deeply cut off from the religious traditions of the Jewish past. Twelve days after the publication of *Josefine*, Kafka's last story, Barth began his first lectures on the prolegomena to dogmatics. This further step, premised on God's gracious assumption of our inadequate speech, took Barth beyond the point where the comparison with Kafka is fruitful.

i. Modernity and the Enlightenment.

The foregoing discussion has considered in some detail the relation between Barth's theological development and German Expressionism. These two histories were closely contemporary, and they can therefore reasonably be seen as situated in and responding to the same set of circumstances. This has, however, meant that the discussion has focussed almost exclusively on the period in which the two histories occurred, which is to say the years 1909 to 1924 or thereabouts. Very little has been said so far either about the larger-scale theological history which Barth understood his work to be in dialogue with, or about the earlier cultural and intellectual history relevant to the understanding of modernist movements. What would be beneficial at this stage, I would suggest, is some consideration of these larger histories, with a view to improving our understanding of the origins and nature of the modernity to which I take both Barth and Expressionism to have been responding.

To that end, I propose to use this and the following chapters to consider two distinct accounts of the Enlightenment, which I take to have been a central episode in the relevant history. The first of these accounts is to be found in the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre, and in particular in his influential book *After Virtue*.[1] This concentrates on moral theory and discourse, but happens to describe the Enlightenment in terms which illuminate its contribution to the circumstances of modernity experienced in the early part of this century. The second account to be considered is Barth's own, in his lectures on the background to and history of modern Protestant theology. MacIntyre's argument will, I hope, provide a plausible context for the modernity already described. If it can do this, then the argument of the previous chapter will be enlarged, such that the relation of Barth's ideas to modernism will at the same time constitute a relation between Barth's ideas and the Enlightenment. The account of modernity contained in the foregoing chapters would also derive some support from this outcome. The discussion

[1] *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Duckworth, London, 2nd edition 1985).

of Barth's lectures, on the other hand, will supplement this consideration of MacIntyre, since the latter has little to say about German culture and ideas, or about the influence of the Enlightenment on religion and theology. In addition, though, the fact that this is *Barth's* account of these subjects is important. For if it proves to be congruent with the reading of his theology offered so far, that reading will be defended as well as expanded. Thirdly, such an outcome would defend the commensurability of my reading with what I take to be Barth's own point of view. It will, that is to say, defend my claim that attention to context does not presuppose hostility to Barth's theology but can yield better theological understanding of his work.

A benefit of considering the two narratives together, beside those listed above, is that they may prove to be mutually illuminating. I will attempt to make use of this in due course, particularly by drawing on MacIntyre's ideas to clarify the structure of Barth's narrative. The value of MacIntyre's work in this regard will, I hope, become clear when I consider Barth's lectures in chapters 5 and 6.

ii. The background to the Enlightenment

First, though, some general comments on the Enlightenment may be useful. It is customary to think of it as an intellectual movement characterized by ideas of individual freedom, religious toleration, and the equality of citizens before the law. We associate it with a flowering of culture and polite society in eighteenth century Europe, and with an optimistic belief in social progress. Such images may not tell the whole story, but neither are they entirely without foundation. We should not assume, though, that eighteenth century Europe was so dazzled by its optimism that it was unaware of the destructive capacities of human nature. As one commentator, Nicholas Till, has put it:

> The *philosophes* and *Aufklärer* were certainly believers in progress; but while one eye of the Enlightenment was always focussed gladly on the bright future, the other eye was trained uneasily on the recent past. For the Enlightenment had been born in the shadow of the disintegration of social order which had occurred throughout Europe in the seventeenth century, following what had seemed like an almost total collapse of political and

> religious authority. Civil war on a scale hitherto unknown had riven nations and overthrown established political powers; religious doubt had come to assail those not possessed and consumed by the new fanaticisms; status and property no longer offered security and certainty.
>
> The unrest of the mid-seventeenth century forced a fundamental reappraisal of the principles of social order, which led people to ask whether the traditional bonds could ever again be adequate. The brutal spectre of anarchy so pitilessly portrayed in Hobbes's *Leviathan* haunts eighteenth-century Europe.[2]

Against such a background, the Enlightenment appears as an attempt to work out new accounts of human nature, society and the cosmos, in order to defend social and moral life against the threat of chaos. There were two sides to the Enlightenment coin, then: one of awareness of the disintegration of the medieval social order and its legitimations, and fear of anarchy; the other determined to transcend this loss and the disruptions of the previous century by forging a new basis for order.[3]

Also relevant as background to the Enlightenment was the rise of capitalism in early modern Europe. Till, again, offers a useful description of this, bringing out its significance for the development of Enlightenment ideas. In the medieval period, he notes:

> Most people had been born into a predetermined social position that defined them throughout their life, and placed them within a network of hierarchies and institutions understood to be part of the divine, unchanging order: a person was inseparable from his or her role in society; he or she was a peasant, an artisan, a knight, and not an individual who happened to have this or that occupation; and the medieval person's role carried with it a number of pre-ordained obligations such as those of kinship or feudal duty.

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[2] Nicholas Till *Mozart and the Enlightenment* (Faber and Faber, London, 1992), 1.

[3] This latter aspect is nicely illustrated by Jeffrey Stout's comments to the effect that Enlightenment ideas represent a necessary attempt to articulate a notion of the common good despite lack of agreement about religious confessions. Thus: "What made the creation of liberal institutions necessary, in large part, was the manifest failure of religious groups of various sorts to establish rational agreement on their competing detailed visions of the good. It was partly because people recognized putting an end to religious warfare and intolerance as morally good—as rationally preferable to continued attempts at imposing a more nearly complete vision of the good by force—that liberal institutions have been able to get a foothold here and there around the globe." Jeffrey Stout *Ethics after Babel: the languages of morals and their discontents* (James Clarke & Co., Cambridge, 1988), 212. This also provides a useful perspective on the Enlightenment's tendency to be hostile to traditional religious doctrine and its strong commitment to religious toleration. Stout says: "Might it be that theology got into trouble with the intellectuals largely because it was unable to provide a vocabulary for debating and deciding matters pertaining to the common good without resort to violence?" ibid. 222.

> Binding this multiplicity of institutions and hierarchies together was the authority and power of the Church ... . The stability of medieval society was undermined from within by the dynamics of economic growth: the opening-up of markets, the widening circulation of commodities, the accumulation of wealth by a new class that derived its power from money rather than status. This in turn forced into being another class without status obligations, which sold its labour in exchange for a wage. Thus the demands of economic activity gave rise to some of the basic ideals of the Enlightenment itself: individual freedom, legal equality, religious toleration.[4]

Once again, such factors emphasize the character of the Enlightenment as a project, an attempt to articulate new moral, legal and religious principles consistent with the emerging social order, and thereby to legitimate that order and ward off the threat of chaos.

iii. MacIntyre's thesis: emotivist culture and the Enlightenment

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre has advanced just such a view of the Enlightenment, depicting it as the project of providing a new account of and justification of morality, in the changed and changing circumstances of modern European society. It is a project which, in his opinion, has failed, and that failure has resulted in the emergence of what he calls 'emotivist culture'. He begins his account by suggesting a hypothesis which turns out to constitute the framework for the subsequent narrative. This hypothesis is that our moral discourse, which was formerly coherent and in good order, so to speak, has passed through a crisis in which much of its coherence and significance has been lost. It has become separated from the social contexts in which it originated. Its meaning has become problematic and questionable; connections can no longer be made, implications have been forgotten. Yet all of this has been largely invisible to those involved in it. Our current situation is therefore one in which we continue to use moral language, without realizing the extent to which it is in a state of disorder. The initial presentation of this hypothesis as a historical process is important, for the disorder results from the loss of previous contexts of meaning. In the absence of these contexts, he suggests, we are left only with:

> the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts

[4] Till op. cit. 2-3.

> from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.[5]

Defending this hypothesis requires the elaboration of a narrative, then, and MacIntyre supplies it by first enlarging on his analysis of contemporary moral discourse, and then working backwards to attempt to explain the development of the disorder so described. He begins by asserting that moral argument in modern societies is characteristically interminable, and disagreement is typically insoluble. He illustrates this with a number of examples of particular moral arguments, notable only for their familiarity and ubiquity - arguments about the morality of war, about abortion, and about the ethics of private health care and education. On the basis of these examples he makes three specific claims. The first is that they demonstrate the conceptual incommensurability of many of our most common arguments. These arguments, and many others like them, are presented again and again in all manner of settings, without ever coming close to a clear victory of one against an other. Such victories and defeats as occur are on the basis of superior or inferior rhetoric, rather than the ability of one argument to count decisively against an other. The reason for this interminability is that the competing arguments are based on quite distinct principles. One invokes justice as its founding premise, while another is built on survival. One appeals to the notion of rights, while another argues from the notion of a universalizable will. One makes its case on grounds of equality, while another highlights liberty. MacIntyre comments:

> From our rival conclusions we can argue back to our rival premises, but when we do arrive at our premises argument ceases and the invocation of one premise against another becomes a matter of pure assertion and counter-assertion.[6]

His second claim draws our attention in a rather different direction. While moral argument typically comes to resemble "pure assertion and counter-assertion", it has at least the appearance of a very different nature. The arguments we use present themselves as impersonal rational arguments.

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[5] *AV*, 2.

[6] Ibid. 8.

They seem to appeal to criteria independent of the person making the moral utterance. They are not reasons of the form "Do this because I will it." They seem to argue, rather, "Do this because it is right, irrespective of my will or yours." When combined with the first point, this seems to yield a paradox: if moral discourse is essentially the clash of irreconcilable wills, why does it have the appearance of rational argument? "If the surface appearance of argument is only a masquerade, the question remains 'Why *this* masquerade?' "[7] But if the appearance of rationality is more than a mask, if there is a way of deciding rationally between these arguments, why is moral debate so interminable?

MacIntyre's third claim forms the bridge between this paradox and its historical origins in the catastrophe mentioned in his initial scenario. His initial point is about the diversity of these origins. The examples he gave of moral argument can be traced to sources as diverse as Aristotle, Machiavelli, Marx, Fichte, Locke, Kant, Aquinas, Rousseau and Adam Smith. Such a list of names can mislead, though: MacIntyre wishes to see our arguments as rooted in entire cultures, rather than individual works of moral thought. This is important, as the substance of this third claim is that our moral concepts are derived from particular historical cultures in which they were deeply rooted. The problem for us is that they are no longer so rooted. They once "enjoyed a role and function supplied by contexts of which they have now been deprived".[8] Furthermore, in the journey from their original home, most of the concepts we use have undergone semantic change. The history of the journey undertaken by the characteristic terms of our moral vocabulary, including the history of semantic change, will constitute the full elaboration of the narrative of transition from coherence to incoherence initially proposed by MacIntyre.

The first stop in this journey is with emotivist theories of moral utterance. Emotivism, in its classic forms, (MacIntyre refers mainly to C.L. Stevenson, perhaps its most influential advocate in the 1930s and 1940s) is a thesis about the meaning of moral language. It claims that moral statements can be translated into statements expressing attitudes and feelings. Thus Stevenson

[7] *AV*, 9.
[8] Ibid. 10.

asserted a semantic equivalence between "This is good." and "I approve of this; do so as well." MacIntyre argues that emotivism is an abject failure as a semantic view. If any worthwhile account is to be given of the meaning of moral language, the nature of the approval involved will have to be described. But no adequate description of it can be given. The tendency will always be to fall back toward the vacuously circular answer "moral approval". A more serious point is that MacIntyre has already given grounds for supposing that moral utterances and expressions of attitude are not semantically equivalent. To make a moral claim, he said, is to give a reason for action which appeals to criteria independent of the particular utterance. This is clearly not the case with a statement like "I approve of this; do so as well." Expression of attitudes and feelings, MacIntyre suggests, is characteristically a feature of the pragmatic dimension of language, rather than the semantic. It is a matter of the function or use of an utterance, rather than its meaning.

It is at this point though that MacIntyre draws attention to what he considers to be a genuine insight hidden, albeit unwittingly, within in emotivist theory. For he suggests that emotivism is correct not as an account of moral discourse as such, but as an account of the the typical use of moral discourse in its disordered modern state. Contemporary moral discourse, he argues, is frequently *in fact* no more than the expression of attitudes. MacIntyre is inclined to maintain, not surprisingly, that moral utterance still has semantic content which is not exhausted by its expressive use; yet in such circumstances there is a conflict between meaning and use. They are "at odds in such a way that meaning would tend to conceal use."[9] The danger is that a speaker lends unwarranted dignity to their own attitudes and feelings by cloaking them in the guise of independent, universally valid reasons for action. Moral argument of this sort comes perilously close to manipulation, even if the speakers are as deceived as the hearers.

MacIntyre's narrative proceeds backwards, in an attempt to account for the origin of this problematic situation. The immediate predecessor of emotivism, as every text-book of the subject records, was the view known as

[9] *AV*, 14.

intuitionism and associated with the likes of H.A. Prichard and, particularly, G.E. Moore. Stevenson had been a pupil of Moore; MacIntyre argues that there is an important connection between intuitionism and emotivism: "wherever something like emotivism is found to flourish it generally is the successor theory to views analogous to Moore's or Prichard's."[10] Why should this be so? Because, MacIntyre suggests, intuitionism like that of Moore expressed and fostered a milieu in which moral discourse *was* essentially expressive of feelings and attitudes. The moral discourse with which the emotivists were most familiar was the discourse of Moore and others like him - and they analysed it astutely and, for the most part, correctly. That discourse therefore forms a paradigm case of what MacIntyre has asserted is true of the generality of modern moral debate - i.e. a *de facto* emotivism, a use of moral discourse to express the feelings and attitudes of the debaters. If MacIntyre is correct, intuitionism, and the attitudes and judgements of those who espoused it, are particularly revealing of the basic character of contemporary moral discourse.

What is it about intuitionism that would make this so, and why should it be particularly a precursor of emotivism? Briefly, Moore's *Principia Ethica* claimed to offer a decisive solution to the problems of ethics by attending carefully to the particular nature of the subject. Moore believed that a solution to the problems of ethics could be built upon a careful analysis of the meaning of key terms. In particular, he argued that 'good' is not to be identified with any natural property. It cannot be defined, at least where definition is taken to mean analysis of the concept. 'Good' is unanalysable. There is no other concept or group of concepts which can be substituted for it without alteration of content. Moore's famous "naturalistic fallacy" is the error of defining goodness in terms of other properties belonging to things which are good. He sees nothing wrong with a project of identifying such other properties - so long as we don't imagine that we have thereby said all there is to say about goodness. We must not think we define goodness by such an inquiry. 'Good' is the name of a non-natural, unanalysable quality. It is not a complex quality but a simple one, incapable of being broken down in terms of other concepts. To this extent, the term "naturalistic fallacy" may

[10] *AV*, 18.

be a little misleading, and was in fact acknowledged to be so by Moore himself. The basic error he identifies in other moral philosophies is the treatment of fundamental moral terms as analysable, complex, capable of being broken down into other concepts or having other notions substituted for them.

Moore was reluctant to suggest that there is a faculty of apprehension named intuition which we employ in making moral judgements. He did, however, give the name 'intuition' to propositions declaring the goodness of some situation or course of action. Such intuitions are not based on evidence, and are not amenable to proof or disproof. MacIntyre states Moore's view succinctly:

> ... he ... does compare good as a property with yellow as a property in such a way as to make verdicts that a given state of affairs is or is not good comparable to the simplest judgements of normal visual perception.[11]

MacIntyre summarizes the other elements of Moore's position by pointing out first that he was a utilitarian, in that it is the consequences of an action that matter (the question to be asked is how much good a course of action will produce) and secondly by noting the views of Moore as to what the greatest goods in human life actually are: "The achievement of friendship and the contemplation of what is beautiful in nature or in art become certainly almost the sole and perhaps the sole justifiable ends of all human action."[12]

MacIntyre further notes that the publication of the *Principia Ethica* was greeted as a liberation, as a substitution of "the fresh air and pure light of common sense" in place of the "religious and philosophical nightmares, delusions, hallucinations in which Jehovah, Christ, St. Paul, Plato, Kant and Hegel had entangled us."[13] He suggests that this enthusiastic reception for Moore's work, alongside its widespread and lasting influence, can only be explained by its happening to catch and express the mood of the moment. In its aestheticised version of morality, in its separation of moral qualities from

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[11] *AV*, 15.
[12] Ibid. 15.
[13] Ibid. 16.

social action, in its sense that it constituted a rejection of the nineteenth century, it articulated widespread experiences and attitudes.

The Bloomsbury group was particularly in the forefront of this. MacIntyre gives some weight to retrospective comments by John Maynard Keynes of the conduct of some of Moore's adherents: "In practice, victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility."[14] Those who felt the *Principia Ethica* to be a liberation were, MacIntyre argues, a group for whom the distinction between moral qualities and personal preferences had largely been lost. In what they regarded as their moral discourse they expressed their preferences, their feelings, their attitudes. Moore's theorizing gave them the means to do this, for they genuinely took themselves to be intuiting the presence of the non-natural property 'good'.

Intuitionism, on this account, is a theory which appears and is taken up at a point in history where any appeal to an independent moral criterion has become problematic. Emotivism is a theory which arises when people continue to use evaluative discourse as if they had such a criterion, despite the fact that "all grasp of any such criterion has been lost."[15] These are important claims; or at least they are important if they have the widespread relevance MacIntyre seeks for them, and are therefore more than observations about the moral discourse and theories prevalent in Cambridge in the years following 1903. MacIntyre makes brief reference therefore to Nietzsche and Sartre, both of whom, he suggests, express the insight that the moral discourse of their societies exhibited a *de facto* emotivism. Relevant here is Nietzsche's identification of the will-to-power as the actual source of would-be moral judgements, reflecting a culture in which the use of moral discourse disguises the fact that reasons can no longer be given for such judgements. Likewise Sartre can be pressed into service, in virtue of his critique of bourgeois morality as "an exercise in bad faith by those who cannot tolerate the recognition of their own choices as the sole source of moral judgement".[16]

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[14] quoted *AV*, 14.
[15] Ibid. 18.
[16] Ibid. 22.

It is worth pausing at this point to note how well this analysis of moral discourse and theory accords with what has been said about modernity in chapters 2 and 3. The emotivist culture in which modern moral discourse takes place is one in which moral judgements are not statements about an objective reality. Values cannot be derived from facts. Moral language does not operate by means of reference to extra-personal moral truth but by expressing attitudes and emotions. There is a clear parallel here with the modernist culture in which the ability of language to connect to or represent reality is in doubt, and the expression of inner realities becomes more important than the representation of external realities which are in doubt. In addition the relativism inherent in modernist aesthetics finds a resonance in emotivism. In the culture MacIntyre describes there are no absolute moral values; moral judgements differ from person to person according to the beliefs, attitudes, desires and emotions of that individual. They do so because moral language must now be used outwith the social contexts from which its meaning derived; just as modernist artists and writers had to work in a world in which the inherited conventions of artistic practice and social life were in doubt, estranged from the contexts in which they had originated.

iv. The failure of the Enlightenment project

The next stage in MacIntyre's argument is to explain the emergence of this emotivist culture. His central claim is that it was the direct result of the failure of the Enlightenment project of securing some rational, tradition-independent basis for morality. How did this failure come about, though? Why did the Enlightenment project run out of steam and provide the emotivist self with its premises? MacIntyre begins his answer by turning to Soren Kierkegaard. The work he discusses is *Enten-Eller*, which he sees as "a book which is at once the outcome and the epitaph of the Enlightenment's systematic attempt to discover a rational justification for morality."[17]

Its novelty and value was that it placed at the root of morality the notion of

[17] *AV*, 39.

a choice for which no further reason could be given. MacIntyre argues that the literary form of *Enten-Eller* - the competing and unresolved presentations of the ethical life and the aesthetic life in the form of the papers of the characters 'A' and 'B' - is a critical clue to Kierkegaard's own concern. Kierkegaard simply presents the choice, the either/or. He is not in MacIntyre's view to be identified with either option, nor even with any specific thesis about the ultimacy of the choice. The choice, the either/or, is simply present.

The second feature of the *Enten-Eller* which MacIntyre is interested in is the conflict between the notion of radical choice, and the notion of the ethical life which is presented as one of the choices.

> The ethical is presented as that realm in which principles have authority over us, independently of our attitudes, preferences and feelings. ... But now whence does the ethical derive this kind of authority?[18]

The point is that it does not make sense to talk of a principle as authoritative over us if we have to choose whether to accept that principle or some competing one. How can a principle be authoritative if it is open to us not to choose it as a principle? MacIntyre links this to having reasons for the choices we make. A principle is authoritative just in so far as there is a good reason for accepting it as a principle. But where no reason can be offered whatsoever, where we are faced with a choice for which no reasons *can* be given, then no option can be authoritative for us. MacIntyre believes, then, that there is a contradiction at the heart of *Either/Or*: "if the ethical has some basis, it cannot be provided by the notion of radical choice".[19] A final element in the book is identified by MacIntyre as relevant to his case: he points out that Kierkegaard presents not *an* ethical life to his readers, but *the* ethical life. The content of the demands of ethics is not difficult for Kierkegaard to specify, for he presents what he has inherited. The content of his ethics is highly conservative. In MacIntyre's view there is as a result a "deeply incoherent combination" of the inherited and the novel at the heart of the book. To grasp this is to have the key not only to Kierkegaard but to the whole history of the Enlightenment's attempts to provide a rational

[18] *AV*, 41-2.
[19] Ibid. 43.

grounding for morality.

MacIntyre's next step backwards is to Kant. The contrast that interests MacIntyre is an obvious one: Kant builds his ethics not on ungrounded choice but on reason. But behind this contrast, claims MacIntyre, lie several similarities: he points to the conservative content of ethics in both cases - Kant was no maverick either in moral judgement; moreover in Kant, as in Kierkegaard, morality is sharply distinguished from questions of happiness or from questions of God's command; the authority of ethical precepts is given great stress in both also - for Kant, the moral law is absolutely binding. MacIntyre's exposition is brief, based almost exclusively on the *Groundwork*. His criticisms are fairly conventional also: he points to the difficulty of reconciling the various formulations Kant has of the categorical imperative; he questions whether Kant's test for moral maxims will actually either allow the ones he wants to pass to do so, or exclude those which quite clearly he would not wish to pass. At bottom, MacIntyre's point is that Kant fails in his task. His arguments fall short of their aim, and have not in fact stood the test of time; reason alone is not conclusively shown to be capable of supplying the required grounding for morality. It is, frankly, hard to disagree with this. But equally it is hard to see at this point why MacIntyre has bothered to introduce Kant into his narrative. The reason is in fact simply this: the failure of Kant's attempt to justify morality was recognized well by Kierkegaard, and that failure was his starting point. Kierkegaard conceived morality largely in Kantian terms, but, recognizing the failure of Kant's project, proclaimed choice rather than reason to be the source of morality. MacIntyre sees "Kierkegaardian choice as a surrogate for Kantian reason".[20]

MacIntyre's next step follows the same pattern: having offered Kant's failure as the starting point for Kierkegaard, he now seeks the stimulus which prompted Kant. He turns therefore to Diderot and Hume, and to their views of desire and the passions. Again the treatment is brief, and the points MacIntyre seeks quite simple. Diderot is discussed first, and accorded the dubious honour of having, in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, shown why his own

[20] *AV*, 47.

attempt to found morality on desire cannot work. He shows, according to MacIntyre, that we require some way of choosing between different desires, since desires have a tendency to conflict with one another. But if, in this connection, there is some criterion which is not desire and by means of which our desires can be discriminated, then desire is no longer the source of our moral judgements. Similarly Hume's attempts to use the passions as the basis for a moral scheme, in the *Treatise* and then the second *Enquiry*, demonstrate the impossibility of the task, claims MacIntyre. In the former, Hume attempted to answer the question as to why we should obey moral rules when they are not in our interest without recourse to an innate source of altruism. By the time he wrote the *Enquiry*, he realized this is impossible, and proposed a passion named sympathy as the solution. MacIntyre dismisses sympathy, in the forms used by both Hume and, later, Adam Smith, as "a philosophical fiction".[21]

What conclusions are to be drawn from this brief tour of modern moral philosophy? The theories MacIntyre has examined are chiefly characterized by their failure to find a firm grounding for moral judgements and beliefs. He claims in fact that their greatest successes were in their criticisms of their competitors in the project. Hume attempts to explain and justify morality in terms of the passions because he believes that it must find its home either there or in reason - and he has powerful arguments against the latter view. Similarly Kant takes the course that he does having excluded by his arguments the possibility of using the passions. Kierkegaard pursued the path he did having rejected both of the previously explored alternatives.

Why, though, did the Enlightenment project apparently end in this failure? Why, when it was so convinced of its own moral superiority to the previous social order, should it have been incapable of coming up with a coherent account of and defence of morality? MacIntyre has an impressively simple answer for these questions. He portrays the problems of Kant, Hume, Smith, Diderot, Kierkegaard *et al* as the outcome of the breakdown of the medieval moral scheme. That scheme had three essential elements: first of all, a conception of human nature as it is, as it happens to be; secondly a notion of

[21] *AV*, 49.

the *telos* of humanity, human nature as it ought to be; and thirdly, moral precepts and laws, forms of moral reasoning which allow us to make the connection between these two, the means of transition from the first to the second. This scheme is recognisably Aristotelian in outline. It survived and developed principally in theistic ways, in Christian culture but also in Jewish and Islamic forms. It ran into difficulties, though, with the development of a different conception of rationality in the late middle ages and early modern period. The most obvious illustration of this is Calvin's view of the fall as having corrupted the powers of human reason.[22] Reason, on this view, can not discern essences - it cannot apprehend a *telos* of human life or deal with matters of potentiality and act. MacIntyre notes the crucial role played by Pascal, who realized the congruence between this limited view of reason and that which was operative in the developing natural sciences. Reason was now seen as calculative, able to speak of means, but bound to silence on the subject of ends.

The important thing to realize is that this view of reason is shared by all major Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment theorists. It is true for Kant as much as for Hume that reason is limited in its powers. It cannot discern a *telos* towards which we will advance as we act morally - there is no place for anything resembling this in Kant's scheme, except as a "presupposition of pure practical reason". There is no real human essence discovered or discoverable by reason. This is true for Pascal, Hume, Diderot, Kant, Kierkegaard, and any other significant modern theorist one may care to mention. MacIntyre only adds that "to understand this is to understand why their project of finding a basis for morality had to fail".[23] In MacIntyre's view what modernity has tried to work with is two parts of the older scheme without the third; and without that third element, the notion of the *telos*, human nature as it can become, the elements that are left cannot be reconciled.

What we are left with is "incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of

[22] MacIntyre notes, in passing, that Hume's Calvinist inheritance may have had something to do with his view of reason as the slave of the passions.
[23] *AV*, 54.

thought and action".[24] The notion that no 'ought' can be derived validly from an 'is' could never have gained acceptance where factual claims about the essence or *telos* of humanity were allowed. It could therefore never have gained currency where traditional structures of moral reason were accorded any respect. MacIntyre points out that this principle, so often associated with Hume, is in fact characteristic of the whole course of modern moral theory. He also points out that when this principle became established, the traditional view of moral judgements as factual was inevitably banished. In Kant, the moral law yields only imperatives, not factual judgements. The adoption of the principle of no 'ought' from an 'is' actually signifies the futility of the Enlightenment project.

This, then, is MacIntyre's account of the failure of the Enlightenment project, and the emotivist culture it has produced. He has talked almost exclusively of moral theory and discourse, though. What of the wider picture? The significant point is that the incoherence he has identified in moral discourse is the consequence of social change, since moral language had become detached from the social contexts from which it had derived and in which it made sense. The processes of change were not just matters of morality: MacIntyre himself makes reference to the rise of modern science and to the Reformation, as noted above. And though he confines his discussion to moral theory, for the most part, he does affirm a general historical connection between theory and practice, commenting that:

> there ought not to be two histories, one of political and moral action and one of political and moral theorizing, because there were not two pasts, one populated only by actions, the other only by theories. Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorizing and every expression of belief is a political and moral action.[25]

He insists that to analyse moral theory and moral discourse is at the same time to analyse the societies in which they arise: "it is not clear to me ... how *any* adequate philosophical analysis in this area could escape being also a sociological hypothesis, and *vice versa*".[26] Thus when MacIntyre talks of the

[24] *AV*, 55.
[25] Ibid. 61.
[26] Ibid. 72.

appearance of intuitionism and emotivism at that point in history at which moral judgement had lost touch with an objective criterion, such that it "lacked any public, shared rationale or justification"[27] he is not just talking about the history of moral theory. His claims have wider implications, some of which relate to the position of religion in modern societies. MacIntyre writes:

> In a world of secular rationality religion could no longer provide such a shared background and foundation for moral discourse and action; and the failure of philosophy to provide what religion could no longer furnish was an important cause of philosophy losing its central cultural role and becoming a marginal, narrowly academic subject.[28]

It is implicit in MacIntyre's argument that religious discourse in modern societies is in a situation analogous to that of moral discourse. It lacks any public shared rationale or justification; its theological articulation, having failed to provide this, has become marginal and narrowly academic. Moreover it is even possible that theology will be seen to mirror moral philosophy, and in the aftermath of the failure of the Enlightenment project will take forms analogous to intuitionism and emotivism. As such we might expect to find theology conceiving its object in a manner reminiscent of Moore's non-natural properties; we might, moreover, find it reflecting the fact that access to any public, rationally defensible criterion of truth has become deeply problematic.

v. Intuitionism and modern theology

It is interesting to note, then, that there are significant resemblances between Moore's intuitionism and the theology of the young Barth, and in precisely the areas that MacIntyre's narrative would lead one to expect. Intuitionism represents the theorizing of the point at which philosophers could no longer offer any reasons for moral judgements and principles, beyond the attribution of moral qualities. In MacIntyre's view, of course, it is an attempt to theorize for a world in which there are no grounds for preferring one judgement to another - and therefore an unconscious concealment of the fact

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[27] *AV*, 50.
[28] Ibid. 50.

that choice has become sovereign. Correspondingly, in the work of Herrmann and the young Barth, theology reached a point where the relation between its discourse and its object became extraordinarily problematic. Like Moore's ethics, Herrmannian theology affirmed that it was concerned with a real object. In both cases, though, no process of reasoning can lead to a knowledge of the presence or nature of the object. In both, the object in question is simply apprehended in experience, in a process analogous to perception; but in neither case was it possible to affirm the activity of an infallible faculty of intuition able to accomplish this task.[29] In both cases, cognitive discourse cannot describe the object: 'good' is the name of a simple and unanalysable property, for Moore; just as the word 'God' is not a description but the name of a reality inaccessible to philosophical epistemology and quite distinct from the world of law-governed, rational cognition and discourse.

In addition, both Moore's ethics and Herrmannian theology explicitly opposed naturalism, and accused much of the previous century of having committed this particular sin. They were, moreover, essentially at one in what they meant by this. By naturalism Moore meant the mistake of confusing the non-natural and the natural, of failing to appreciate that moral qualities are simple and unanalysable, and in this mistaken state attempting to define moral qualities by means of natural properties. The naturalism opposed by Herrmann and Barth similarly was the mistake of confusing the non-natural and the natural, failing to appreciate the distinction between God and the world. Certainly the two did not draw the line between natural and non-natural in precisely the same place. In both, though, there is a stark dualism between a realm in which reasoning is possible, and the realm of ultimate truth and value, for which all rational cognition is inadequate.

[29] It ought to be emphasized that Herrmannian theology drew on Ritschl, and particularly on his distinction between nature and spirit. Fisher provides a useful concise description of the characteristics of theologies influenced by Ritschl: "First, there was the denial that philosophy, natural science, or any form of theoretical knowledge that refused to adopt this revelatory and experiential basis, could articulate any general statement about the world or attain reliable knowledge of God. There was, secondly, the view that philosophy was incapable of assessing the truth claims of religious knowledge. Thirdly ... there was a naïve theory about religious experience which maintained that God is known chiefly through introspection." (Fisher *Revelatory Positivism?* 131.)

Both the theology of the young Karl Barth and the ethics of the *Principia Ethica* are characterized by an emphasis on the distinctness of their respective objects, which serves to separate those objects from the realm in which rational discourse is possible. The significance of this is that Barth's earliest theology can be read as part of the post-history of the Enlightenment project, in the same manner as Moore's ethics. It is reasonable to see Barth's theology marking the point at which access to any public, rationally defensible criterion of truth for religious claims has become deeply problematic. This is not the sole significance of the parallel, though. More important still is the fact that it gives us a new perspective on Barth's disillusionment with, and turn away from, the theology of his youth. For it consisted in the rejection of that element in Herrmannism which tends to conceal the real situation of modern theology: its belief that religious experience provides access to a realm of genuine truth and value. In his rejection of this grounding of theology in experience, I would suggest, Barth maintained his convictions regarding the distinctness of the object of theology, but rejected the licence for theological and religious speech that this distinctness had allowed. He accepted that there is no access for theology to the truth at which it aims. Religious experience had, in Herrmannian theology, served to conceal the fact that we lack the ability to give reasons to defend our use of religious language. Barth's rejection of this use of experience amounts to the acceptance that our religious language is indefensible. Emotivists regarded Moore's non-natural properties as philosophical fictions, concealing the true function of moral discourse. After 1915 Barth began to regard the God intuitable in religious experience as a theological fiction, (the 'No-God' of *Romans*),[30] which served to conceal the true situation of theology and humanity.

There is one further parallel between Moore's ethics and the young Barth. I suggested in chapter 1 that a Herrmannian dualism of faith could actually

[30] See for example *Romans II*, p. 50: "... sometimes the behaviour of men or of animals is exalted to be an experience of God, sometimes the Being and Existence of God is 'enjoyed' as a human or animal experience. In all this the prime factor is provided by the illusion that it is possible for men to hold communication with God ... But, on whatever level it occurs, if the experience of religion is more than a void, or claims to contain or to possess or to 'enjoy' God, it is a shameless and abortive anticipation of that which can proceed from the unknown God alone. In all this busy concern with concrete things there is always a revolt against God. For in it we assist at the birth of the 'No-God', at the making of idols."

be understood as the retreat of theology behind barriers which would be impervious to scientific and historical criticism. Interestingly, MacIntyre points out that the substance of Moore's ethics can also be understood as a rearguard action rather than an advance. He notes the considerable measure of continuity between the *Principia Ethica* and the views of some of the predecessors whom Moore took himself to be refuting. He points out for example that Moore's scheme was consequentialist rather than deontological, for it is the results of our actions that we have to have in mind as we seek to discern the presence of goodness and make moral judgements. He identifies the utilitarianism of Henry Sidgwick in particular as having many things in common with Moore's views - save that Sidgwick regarded his conclusions with deep pessimism, whereas Moore proclaimed substantially the same conclusions as a great discovery and a liberation.[31] Sidgwick, to a greater degree than any of his utilitarian predecessors, recognized the difficulties of specifying happiness in a coherent and unified way even for the individual, let alone for the greatest number. He came, extremely reluctantly, to the conclusion that our moral beliefs cannot be unified and their acceptance must be unargued. MacIntyre quotes Sidgwick's judgement that "where he had looked for Cosmos, he had found only Chaos".[32] After 1915, Barth's theology embodies the insight that where

[31] MacIntyre, incidentally, is not correct when he states (*AV*, 65) that Moore borrowed from Sidgwick without acknowledgement. On p. 17 of his *Principia Ethica*, Moore claims that only one philosopher, namely Henry Sidgwick, has anticipated him in his arguments against naturalism, and in support of the indefinability of good. Additionally though, as W.D. Hudson has pointed out, Moore is incorrect in crediting only Sidgwick with this anticipation. See *Modern Moral Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1970), 72f. Hudson notes that a number of prominent eighteenth century moralists made points very similar to Moore's. Among these were Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Cudworth; but the most striking anticipations are by Richard Price. In his *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, published in 1758, he wrote this: "Right and wrong when applied to actions which are commanded or forbidden by the will of God, or that produce good or harm, do not signify merely, that such actions are commanded or forbidden, or that they are useful or hurtful, but a *sentiment* concerning them and our consequent approbation or disapprobation of the performance of them. Were this not true, it would be palpably absurd in any case to ask, whether it is *right* to obey a command or *wrong* to disobey it; and the propositions, *obeying a command is right*, or *producing happiness is right*, would be most trifling, as expressing no more than that obeying a command, is obeying a command, or producing happiness, is producing happiness." Price *Review* ed. D.D. Raphael, (Oxford, 1948), 16-7. Quoted by Hudson, p. 73. It is interesting to note that the main division among eighteenth century British moralists was between those who can be labelled the 'moral sense' school and those who can be called 'rational intuitionists'. Even without considering the views of such writers, these designations make it clear that they represent other forms of the principal options available to Enlightenment moral theorists in MacIntyre's narrative.

[32] *AV*, 65.

the Enlightenment had sought Cosmos, there existed only *Krisis*.

vi. Modernity and the ubiquity of choice.

There is one other aspect of modernity which comes to the fore in MacIntyre's narrative. Central to the societies which have emerged from the failed Enlightenment project is the notion of ungrounded choice or decision. This became particularly visible with Kierkegaard, as was noted. In *Enten-Eller*, ungrounded choice lies behind all action, for the choice that faces us is not just between good and evil: more fundamental still is the decision whether to choose in terms of good and evil, or whether to make one's choices according to some other scheme. Yet even if Kierkegaard is judged to be part of the project that failed, even if there is an inconsistency between his idea of groundless decision and the notion of morality as something authoritative and binding, the principle he exposed remains. It is his notion of groundless choice that emerges from the ruins of Enlightenment project. If nothing in untutored human nature - neither its passions, its reason nor simply its choices - can satisfactorily account for and justify the authoritative character of moral claims, the implication is that moral judgements, which masquerade as authoritative and binding, in fact have no source outside the individual. There are no given moral standards: each individual is the source of their own judgements and actions. The notion of ungrounded choice seems to describe this situation accurately, no matter that particular actions and judgements will in fact have all manner of contingent causes and grounds, in the passions for example. If the Enlightenment project has failed, then morality lacks a ground of the sort that had been sought: a rational, tradition independent, public, objective basis. For this reason MacIntyre seems right to describe *Enten-Eller* as the "outcome and epitaph" of the Enlightenment's search for a rational basis for morality. And for this reason the notion of ungrounded choice, uncovered by Kierkegaard, is

central to modern morality and society.[33]

Bearing in mind MacIntyre's emphasis on the connection between ideas and their social embodiment, though, it is reasonable to ask whether modern societies do indeed embody this principle of ungrounded choice. Some affirmative observations are possible here, without our having to engage in full-scale sociological analysis. In general terms, the rise of capitalism in early modern Europe meant that economic activity and social relations increasingly followed a contractual pattern, with agents free to enter into agreements or not according to their individual will and not according to inherited obligations. The practical effects of this ought not to be overstated: power and wealth are in practice unequally divided in modern societies, and the extent and value of the freedoms conferred by modernity are disputable. Nonetheless, the fact remains that one of the chief characteristics distinguishing modern societies from their predecessors is that social relations are entered into or avoided according to individual will rather than according to class or status obligations.

What of the period of particular concern in this context, though, the early years of the twentieth century? First of all it must be noted that the prominence of ungrounded choice is a central part of what MacIntyre means when he talks of emotivist culture. In order to support this description he provides some further discussion which is useful despite its brevity and its rather anecdotal character. He suggests that a social world characterized by emotivism will be one in which the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations will be well-nigh obliterated, which is to

[33] It is worth noting that MacIntyre, in a paper published two years later than *After Virtue*, gave a stronger account of Kierkegaard's debt to Kant. See "Moral Philosophy: What Next?" in *Revisions: changing perspectives in moral philosophy* ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, (Notre Dame, 1983), 1-15. It was essential for Kant, MacIntyre points out, that the will is free, and that it can be either a good will, willing in accordance with universalizable maxims, or else a bad will, willing in accordance with desires and appetites. However, Kant's claim that morality can be grounded in rationality in this way came under severe criticism, notably from Hegel. If such criticism is granted, Kant's moral theory collapses leaving only the undetermined will which must choose how it is to will. To paraphrase this, if your moral theory is built on freedom and reason, and you lose hold on reason, you are left with something approximating to ungrounded choice. MacIntyre also argues in the same place that Thomas Reid provided a parallel to Kant in Scotland, and that Reid's views suffered the same fate in so far as his principles of common sense failed to stand up to protracted scrutiny.

say that behaviour will be determined not by the demand to comply with some authoritative norm, but by the desire to implement one's will effectively. MacIntyre gives three examples of how modern social and cultural life reflects this trend. First of all he suggests that Henry James' novel *The Portrait of a Lady* offers a literary portrayal of just such a social world, that of rich European aesthetes in the second half of the nineteenth century. As such it should be seen as a piece of moral commentary to rank with the writing of Diderot and Kierkegaard. It pictures, he argues, "rich aesthetes whose interest is to fend off the kind of boredom that is so characteristic of modern leisure by contriving behaviour in others that will be responsive to their wishes, that will feed their sated appetites."[34] The world depicted is, in other words, one where individual will is unrestrained, subject to no imposed code of behaviour. It is a world where mastery of social relations means mastery of techniques for the successful implementation of whatever one wills.

MacIntyre's second example is of the kind of organizational behaviour suggested by Max Weber's description of bureaucratic rationality. On this account, questions about the aims or ends of behaviour cannot be addressed rationally. Reason can only be calculative, working out the means to an already given end. As for questions of ends, MacIntyre says: "one must simply choose – between parties, classes, nations, causes, ideals. *Entscheidung* plays the part in Weber's thought that choice of principles plays in that of Hare or Sartre."[35] To underline the point MacIntyre quotes Raymond Aron's description of Weber's view: "Values are created by human decisions".[36]

The third of MacIntyre's examples is the therapeutic culture deriving ultimately from Freudian psychoanalysis. Therapy obliterates the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative behaviour as effectively as bureaucracy, he suggests, but in the sphere of personal life. In matters of human behaviour, all that can be addressed rationally is what is covered by

[34] *AV*, 24. MacIntyre notes his debt to William Gass for his reading of this novel. He refers to William H. Gass *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Vintage Books, Boston, 1972), 181-90.
[35] *AV*, 26.
[36] Ibid. 26. See Raymond Aron 'Max Weber' in *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* (vol. 2) trans. R. Howard & H. Weaver, (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1970), 206.

therapeutic technique. Following Philip Rieff, MacIntyre suggests that therapeutic culture replaces truth with psychological effectiveness. Once again we find a dualism between a realm of technique, in which rational discourse is possible, and a realm of aims or ends, which are beyond the scope of reason and where individual choices must simply be made.

These three examples do not by any means amount to a comprehensive study of social relations in European society in the relevant period. Yet they are useful illustrations, filling out MacIntyre's description of emotivist culture. They are pictures of a culture characterized by a dualism: on one hand rational debate and decisions are possible on questions of means, methods, techniques, and efficiency; on the other hand, though, are matters of aims, ends, values, and commitments, where only ungrounded choices can be made. An emotivist culture is a culture in which statements of values and ends are dictated by personal choices, whatever else we might take them for and whatever language we might clothe them in.

What, then, might be the theological significance of the fact that individual will and groundless choice have such prominence in the societies that experienced the Enlightenment project and its failure? It is my contention that Barth's distinctive theology should be seen as situated in and responding to the failure of the Enlightenment project. It was a theological response to the Enlightenment's inability to provide a satisfactory new account of humanity and its place in the cosmos, such as would secure and justify the social order of the modern world. Enlightenment presuppositions could not yield cosmos; the threat of chaos could not be warded off by such means. A different possibility presented itself, though: that the universe is not cosmos but creation. Barth's theology was an attempt to forge just such a post-Enlightenment view; and it was therefore deeply engaged with the ideas and principles of the post-Enlightenment world, and not least with the idea of groundless choice. Barth's fundamental theological innovation, I would argue, was to invert the principle of individual, groundless choice. He turned the notion of an ultimate, unavoidable, groundless choice on its head: what matters is not any choice that *we* might make, no matter the seriousness with which it is taken by us. The significant choice is and can

only be one that has been taken by God, the electing act of God in Jesus Christ.

I have already referred in chapter 1 to the importance of this idea of divine decision in Barth's developing theology: it was present even in his earliest theology; it rose gradually to prominence in his thinking, providing a basis for his turn to dogmatic method in the early 1920s; it was important for the development of his doctrine of the *analogia fidei*; and its ultimate flowering was in the treatment of the doctrine of election contained in volume II/2 of the *Church Dogmatics*, justly described by von Balthasar as "the most magnificent, unified and well-grounded section of the whole" and "the heartbeat of his whole theology".[37] Barth's notion of divine decision, I would argue, not only constitutes an inversion of the neo-Kantian idea of the *Ursprung*, and an inversion of the Expressionist and modernist idea of the constructive mind, but an inversion of the basic principle of social and cultural relations in the post-Enlightenment world. It is important to be clear what is implied by the term 'inversion' though. For one thing it does not mean rejection. Barth's theology is emphatically not a simple rejection of modernity. It would be premature to accuse Barth of seeking to go back behind the Enlightenment and effect a repristination of some pre-modern scheme of thought. His inversion is, rather, an affirmation of modernity and of the unavailability of the grounds which the Enlightenment had hoped to supply. Yet it is an affirmation raised to a higher order. Its presupposition is divine *Ursprung*, constructive mind, decision. To presuppose divine decision is not to do away with the post-Enlightenment sense of contingency, but to affirm it as the truth of a world standing under divine judgement. On the other hand, though, inversion of the principle of ungrounded choice does not mean simply its extension to include an additional realm. To presuppose divine decision is to deny that our own decisions are all that matters. It is to premise a different ground of our existence, including its social and cultural aspects. To presuppose divine decision is not to deny any reality or meaning to human choices; but it does alter their significance, by placing them in the light of divine grace.

[37] Von Balthasar *The Theology of Karl Barth* 174.

To understand Barth's theological innovation as an inversion - of neo-Kantianism, of modernist ideas, of ungrounded choice - is therefore to understand its dialectical character. His response to the principles embodied in modern intellectual, cultural and social life was neither to take them as determinative, obligatory for all enquiry including theology; nor was it to reject them out of hand on the basis of some supposed access to divine truth uncorrupted by the intellectual, cultural and social context. It was to affirm them in the light of divine negation, and to deny them in the light of divine affirmation. In the light of God's No, ungrounded choice is affirmed to be the truth of the reality encountered among the ruins of Enlightenment pride, which was after all only one form of pride. But in the light of God's Yes the significance of human decision is relativized by the ultimate significance of divine grace. Barth attempted, then, to articulate a genuinely modern theology: modern both in its engagement with the principle of ungrounded choice, and in its confirmation of the modern apprehension of our alienation from and inability to represent ultimate truth. Yet it sought to be theology in a way which had escaped most of Barth's immediate predecessors, including his younger self. It recognized the impossibility of theology on Enlightenment presuppositions, and aimed instead at being theological in a much stricter sense, presupposing only God's decision and act in Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, what emerges from MacIntyre's narrative is an account of emotivist culture with remarkable similarities to the modernity described in the previous chapter. Once again familiar contexts of meaning have been lost; once again the ability of our discourse to connect to reality is in doubt; once again expression takes precedence over discourse which aims at truth; and once again the human subject emerges as the sole source of truth and value. And as a result my earlier conclusions about the relation between Barth's theology and its context take on an added dimension.

Yet the account of the Enlightenment provided by MacIntyre is far from complete. It is, for one thing, limited by its nearly exclusive concern with moral discourse and theory. It lacks any significant discussion of the influence of the Enlightenment on religion and theology. Moreover its

discussion of the culture and ideas of the German speaking world, the most immediate background to Barth's thought, is effectively limited to Kant's *Groundwork*. MacIntyre acknowledges all these deficiencies,[38] and he offers partial remedies to some of them in his more recent books.[39] The most obvious remedy from my point of view, however, is to consider Barth's own lectures on the history of modern theology. To examine Barth's analysis of the Enlightenment, after all, will not only supplement the foregoing discussion, but will provide us with a unique perspective on the relation between his theological viewpoint and the context in question.

There is one further reason for studying Barth's lectures, though. It is simply that they have been quite unfairly neglected by commentators on and interpreters of Barth's theology, who have rarely taken them seriously as a source of illumination for his other writings. Yet Barth lectured three times on the history of modern Protestant theology between 1926 and 1933. Apart from his dogmatics lectures, there is no other subject matter which received this degree of attention. For all these reasons, it is to Barth's history lectures that I now want to turn.

[38] See *AV*, 278 and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Duckworth, London, 1988), 11.
[39] See particularly *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Duckworth, London, 1990).

i. Barth's lectures on modern Protestant theology

Barth's lectures on the recent history of Protestant theology developed in a rather unusual fashion. The first series, delivered in Münster in the summer semester of 1926, began with a short introductory section and a brief chronicle of nineteenth century events,[1] and then comprised seventeen sections on individual theologians, ranging from Schleiermacher to Blumhardt.[2] When Barth lectured on this subject for a second time in 1929-30, he appears to have almost completely rewritten this material.[3] More significant, perhaps, is the fact that he extended it not, on the whole, by adding extra detail to his treatment of nineteenth century theology but by adding substantial chapters on Lessing, Kant, Herder, Novalis and Hegel.[4] The third set of lectures, delivered in Bonn in the winter semester of 1932-33 and the summer semester of 1933, displays a similar pattern. This time the material on theology was not revised or added to at all, and of the existing chapters of background material, only that on Lessing was rewritten. Barth's energies were directed instead into the production of a substantial body of new material analysing the culture, religion and theology of the eighteenth

[1] See introduction above p. 1.

[2] Two of these sections, on Schleiermacher and Feuerbach, were published in *Zwischen den Zeiten* and also included in the collection *Theologie und Kirche*. I am advised by Dr. Hinrich Stoevesandt that in view of the substantial differences between these lectures and the later versions, publication of the complete 1926 text is planned for inclusion in the Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe.

[3] I am grateful to Dr. Hinrich Stoevesandt on this point. He suggests that there is a partial taking over of some sections from the earlier text (in particular on Tholuck, Beck and Kohlbrugge) but that the majority were written completely new. This confirms what can be observed in those sections that have been published. The section on Feuerbach, in particular, is not only different in the two versions; the later version is also considerably shorter.

[4] Barth added only two new sections to the discussion of theologians: those on Baur and Ritschl.

century.[5]

What is remarkable about this process is that Barth sought on two occasions to gain greater understanding of modern theology not by discussing it in greater detail but by placing it in the context of intellectual and cultural life, and specifically of the Enlightenment. Moreover the final text produced by this process does constitute a coherent and unified account, despite the fact

[5] See *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert.* The material written new in 1932-33 comprises chapters 2-6 of the published text, pp. 16 to 236. These are entitled, in the English translation: 'Man in the Eighteenth Century'; 'The Problem of Theology in the Eighteenth Century'; 'Protestant Theology in the Eighteenth Century'; 'Rousseau'; and 'Lessing', respectively. Of these only chapter 6, on Lessing, dealt with a subject that had been covered in 1929-30. Barth appears to have mostly discarded that earlier material, though, and written the chapter on Lessing afresh in 1932-3. It should also be noted that chapter 7, on Kant, shows considerable revision and enlargement compared to the 1929 text. This presumably occurred during the preparation of the third series of lectures in 1932-3.
It is important to make this process of development clear. More recent commentators have often been remarkably careless in their assumptions about the date of production of this material. Van A. Harvey is an extreme example. In his essay 'A Word in Defense of Schleiermacher's Theological Method' he describes the section on Schleiermacher in *Protestant Theology* as "Barth's essay of 1952 on Schleiermacher" and, comparing it with Barth's 1922 lectures on Schleiermacher, talks of the thirty year gap between the two treatments. Harvey, in other words, mistakes the date of publication (and not even first publication) for the date of composition. See *The Journal of Religion* XLII (1962), 151f. It is understandable that he was unable to date the material to 1929, but he should at least have been able to date it to 1932/3, which was given as the date of the lectures' delivery in the preface to the German edition, and had been mentioned in reviews of the selection published as *From Rousseau to Ritschl* in 1959. See for example Roger L. Shinn's review in *The Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 15 (1960), 170-2. More recent writers have made similar errors. See for example John L. Thiel, who suggests that a dialogical relationship between Barth and Schleiermacher began only with Barth's essay in *Protestant Theology*, which he dates to 1947, and that the attitude Barth displays there constitutes a departure from "the one-sided, thoroughly polemical, and even ahistorical approach that characterised his preoccupation with Schleiermacher during the 1920s." See 'Barth's Early Interpretation of Schleiermacher' in *Barth and Schleiermacher: Beyond the Impasse?* ed. J.O. Duke and B.F. Streetman, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1988), 11.

that its earliest sections were written last.[6] The material added in 1932-33 genuinely does serve as background to the whole series of lectures. It begins with the section which appeared in the published version as chapter 2, under the title 'Man in the Eighteenth Century'. In it, Barth offers a wide-ranging analysis of the cultural and social life of eighteenth century Europe, from its characteristic political forms to its social life and manners, from its architecture to its music. Only when this is complete does he (in chapter 3) consider the religious life of the eighteenth century; and only when that is complete does he turn (in chapter 4) to the century's theology. These three sections of the lectures, taken together, provide the key to Barth's subsequent analysis of the theology of the nineteenth century, and by implication to much of the theology of his own time too. The remainder of this chapter is therefore devoted to a study of these sections.

ii. The key to the Enlightenment: absolutism

Barth begins by emphasizing that the popular pictures of the Enlightenment's adherents and ideals are inadequate. According to such images, Enlightenment man was "the champion against prejudices and passions, against vice and hypocrisy, ignorance and superstition, intolerance, partiality and fanaticism; he would honour wisdom and virtue, reason and nature..."[7] The standard slogans associated with this picture, "optimism, moralism, intellectualism and so on",[8] do not tell the whole story, though. They catch the likeness of the Enlightenment only partially,

6 This is something which Barth was at great pains to emphasize. When, at a later date, translations of selections from the lectures into English and French were proposed, he refused to provide a foreword for them, on the grounds that the work formed a unity and should not be split up. The publication of selections went ahead without his blessing. He wrote to SCM Press in 1959 as follows: "I have looked at the book again recently and am more than ever convinced that the work is a fragment - but, as a fragment, nevertheless a unity, in which the two chief parts (Background and History) form unities. The reasons which have moved you to present this united fragment in still more fragments, you will have to explain to the English reader yourself: I cannot, because I just do not understand it." See Barth, *PT*, 7. The talk of fragments is a reference to the fact that he had hoped originally to add a chapter on Goethe to the background, and had intended to extend the history section closer to his own day, as far as Troeltsch. See Barth, *PT*, 11. Note that Alasdair MacIntyre was one of the joint editors of the series in which that earlier translation was published. A foreword in the name of the joint editors was included. See *From Rousseau to Ritschl* (SCM Press, London, 1959).

7 Barth, *PT*, 33.

8 Ibid. 34.

missing some of its features entirely. Barth, following H.A. Korff,[9] highlights some of the Enlightenment's other faces, such as the scepticism and resignation depicted in Goethe's Mephistopheles, or the quasi-mysticism of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, or the founding of Freemasonry "in the form of a mystery religion".[10] If rationalism were truly the centre of the Enlightenment, Barth points out, it could not have so soon produced such irrationalism.

What does this mean, though? Must we say that the period's various tendencies and faces are simply divergent, or even in conflict with one another? Is there no sense in which the various faces of the Enlightenment and its time constitute a coherent movement? Barth believes there is. The standard slogans may not capture the coherence of the Enlightenment, but that does not mean that it had no centre. Barth very quickly identifies a unifying principle, which is to serve as the key to his analysis of the period: absolutism. His use of this term is fascinating, for on the one hand he has borrowed it from historians of the period; yet he has, in the borrowing, altered its significance radically. It is of the utmost importance to appreciate the nature of Barth's innovation in his use of the term; and it is therefore necessary first to have some appreciation of its normal significance.

Absolutism had, even in 1932, long been used by historians as a description of a form of political order characteristic of early modern Europe.[11] A particularly influential account of it was formulated by Wilhelm Roscher in 1847, who distinguished three successively stronger forms of monarchial government: 'confessional absolutism', lasting from the Reformation to the end of the Thirty Years War; 'courtly absolutism', which Louis XIV typified, lasting for a century or so from around 1650; and 'enlightened absolutism',

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[9] H.A. Korff *Geist der Goethezeit: einer ideellen Entwicklung der klassisch-romantischen Literaturgeschichte* vol. 1, (J.J. Weber, Leipzig, 1923).

[10] Barth, *PT*, 35.

[11] It originated during the first half of the nineteenth century. See Herbert H. Rowen, 'Louis XIV and Absolutism' in John C. Rule (ed.) *Louis XIV and the Craft of Kingship* (Columbus, Ohio, 1969), 312; cited in H.M. Scott (ed.) *Enlightened Absolutism* (Macmillan, London, 1990), 4. Barth himself mentions the description of the eighteenth century as "The Age of Absolutism" in a work by Walter Goetz which had recently been published at the time of his lectures. See Walter Goetz et al. *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus*, vol. 6 of the *Propyläen-Weltgeschichte*, Berlin, 1931. See Barth, *PT*, 36.

dominant during the second half of the eighteenth century, and exemplified by rulers like Frederick the Great in Prussia and Joseph II in the Habsburg lands.[12] Something like this was still the common view of German historians in 1932.[13] In essence, the term 'absolutism' signifies a focussing of power in the state, and in particular in the monarch, unfettered by parliamentary institutions. It implies a centralizing of government, involving a growth of central governmental institutions.[14] Thus far, absolutism is essentially a matter of political structures. Ideas, and in particular Enlightenment ideas, only become relevant where we are dealing with the last of the three forms identified by Roscher: enlightened absolutism. Much debate has surrounded this notion in recent decades, and doubts have been raised about the reality and nature of the supposed connection between Enlightenment ideas and actual policies.[15]

None of this bodes well for Barth's account. If absolutism is essentially a matter of political structures it is not obvious why it should be the key to a more general analysis of eighteenth century life. Moreover if Enlightenment ideas have little to do with absolutism, and maybe even with so called enlightened absolutism, it seems unlikely that absolutism can help us understand the Enlightenment. Barth allows none of this to worry him, though. For when he proposes absolutism as the key to the century, he is not talking primarily about political forms. They provide him only with a point

12 See Scott *Enlightened Absolutism*, 6. This was the first occasion on which the term 'enlightened absolutism' was used. It indicates the explicit influence of Enlightenment ideas on social and political policy.

13 Ibid. 6-7, and 344 note 21, where Scott notes the affirmation of similar views in 1932 by Fritz Hartung.

14 See for example Jeremy Black: "Absolutism" in *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment* ed. J.W. Yolton, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1991), 11, where he defines absolutist states as "powerful entities with monopolization of power by the government and the growth of central institutions, such as the court, the standing army and the bureaucracy". He adds that the objectives of absolutist states include the "extraction from subjects of the wherewithal needed to support the mainstays of the absolutist regime - that is the standing army and bureaucracy; and the coercion of internal and external opponents of the ruler's policies". It is worth noting also that 'absolutism' and 'despotism' have sometimes been treated as interchangeable terms. K. Maxwell notes however that Fritz Hartung drew a distinction between the two: the absolutist ruler "voluntarily submits to laws and acknowledges the rights of subjects"; whereas despotism is simply "unchecked tyranny". See 'Pombal: The Paradox of Enlightenment and Despotism' in Scott, *Enlightened Absolutism*, 116. The distinction is genuine, and the stipulation of terms sensible, though historiography of the period has not always observed it.

15 See Scott, ibid. 1-15 for a summary of this debate.

of departure: "political structure" he affirms, "is at all times and was therefore also at that time no more than an expression of the order of life, the ideal of life in human powers."[16] For Barth the political structures are important but secondary. They point to something deeper which is their source, and, as he makes clear in due course, the source of many other things also. What interests him is the fundamental idea lying beneath the political structure. Absolutism therefore requires to be redefined, so as to grasp this deeper level, this fundamental idea. Barth readily provides the necessary definition: " 'Absolutism' in general can obviously mean a system of life based upon the belief in the omnipotence of human powers."[17] Given this belief in human powers, a new image of humanity developed:

> Man, who discovers his own power and ability, the potential dormant in his humanity, that is, his human being as such, and looks upon it as the final, the real and the absolute, ... self-justifying, with its own authority and power, which he can therefore set in motion in all directions and without restraint—this man is absolute man.[18]

Defined in this way, absolutism is able to play the rôle Barth has earmarked for it, as the key concept in a wide-ranging survey of eighteenth century society and culture, or, as he puts it, as the key to an entire "system of life". In Barth's hands it becomes a common thread uniting apparently diverse moments within the cultural and intellectual life of the period. It is the connecting factor between the various faces of the century - the less obviously enlightened ones as well as those in the main Enlightenment tradition.

Political structures provide a good example of the way in which the application of the term is widened by its redefinition. For when Barth discusses the politics of the period he detects the presence of absolutism beyond the normal boundaries. It is not limited to the monarchial governments typified by Louis XIV, Frederick the Great, and Joseph II, the "absolute princes" as Barth calls them. The basic redefinition calls for a subsidiary redefinition: "Politically, absolutism means the determination of law by that class in the state which in contrast to the others possesses the

[16] Barth, *PT*, 36.
[17] Ibid. 36.
[18] Ibid. 36.

effective power."[19] This allows Barth to see the French revolution of 1789 as an act of absolutism, just as much as any act of Louis XIV. He is enabled (and inclined) to see it not as the failure of the absolutist principle, nor as a reversal of the previous character of the century, but as its development into a new form - perhaps even its fulfilment. For the French revolutionary government, just as for the absolute princes, the basis for law is the possession of effective power. All that has changed is the identity of the possessors of power.

What, though, of the origins of the new attitudes and convictions Barth calls absolutism? Where did they come from? Barth points to the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, to the expanding colonial power of Europe, to the development of scientific and technological achievement. He suggests, though, that the most important factors were political: specifically he identifies the significant decline in power of the Holy Roman Empire, connected particularly with the events of the Thirty Years War.[20] Though the empire remained in existence throughout the eighteenth century, its power was greatly reduced. It no longer served as a limit over against the territories of which it was comprised, and in due course the Habsburgs became little more than another instance of political absolutism in their hereditary lands. Barth accords great significance to these changes: "Perhaps eighteenth-century man is in this respect best described negatively: he is the man who no longer has an emperor."[21] The empire's significance, in Barth's view, lay in the fact that it had been the concrete form of the understanding that rulers held and exercised power "in common submission with the people before a power which is superior to them both".[22] Political absolutism came about, Barth says, when those left with actual power after the effective collapse of the empire used that power to identify the laws and structures of their domain with their own will. It is this identification

[19] Barth, *PT*, 42. The phrase 'effective power' is interesting, bearing in mind MacIntyre's discussion of effectiveness as the characteristic value of emotivist cultures, and his analysis of bureaucratic authority as nothing but power.

[20] For a concise description of the position of the empire after the end of the Thirty Years War, see *Europe Unfolding 1648-1688* John Stoye, (Fontana, London, 1969), 15-19. For a general view of the political structures of Germany in the eighteenth century, see Bruford, op. cit. 1-11.

[21] Barth, *PT*, 41.

[22] Ibid. 42.

between law and individual will which constitutes the initial (princely) form of political absolutism; Barth insists that this identification has priority over the structures and policies that follow from it. By this identification the absolute ruler is made to be like God. The right and freedom which are established and guaranteed by the state are in fact now established and guaranteed by the ruler. This, Barth, takes it, is the significance of Louis XIV's "L'état c'est moi!".[23]

The analysis described thus far constitutes the core of Barth's thinking about the eighteenth century. What assessment can be made of it? First, a point in its favour. By understanding political absolutism in this way, Barth avoids a criticism which has sometimes been made of the description of eighteenth century government as absolutist. The argument is that the designation is misleading, since it implies the absolute power of the rulers in question.[24] In fact, it is pointed out, the powers of rulers were far from absolute. Historical study of particular rulers and their domains reveals, not surprisingly, a myriad of ways in which their powers were limited.[25] The conclusion has tended to be drawn that 'absolutism' is of little value as a descriptive term for the political systems of the period.

Now it might be thought that this point could be fatal to an analysis like Barth's, which makes absolutism its most essential category. This is not so. Barth's redefinition of the term 'absolutism' actually makes it less vulnerable to this criticism. As redefined, it does not, perhaps, imply that the power of an absolute ruler to implement his or her will was unlimited. Rather it indicates a shift in power, associated with changes in the traditional (and by assumption divinely sanctioned) structures of society. Power shifted away from other estates and was centralized in the monarchy. The ruler was absolute in the sense that his or her will was the final court of appeal, so to speak. Barth does not, and does not need to, assert that such rulers could implement any policy or law they wished without opposition or the need of

23 Barth, *PT*, 43.

24 See for example Jeremy Black in Yolton, op. cit. 11.

25 Black ibid. says this: "The power of the ruler was limited in three significant respects: first, resistance to the demands of the government; second, the often tenuous control of the ruler over the bureaucracy; and third, constraining attitudes towards the proper scope of monarchical authority."

compromise. The point is rather that what is law is understood as the expression of the ruler's will, rather than as the expression of some higher necessity. The loss of the imperial ideal, then, meant the loss of any higher authority in terms of which law was to be justified; it therefore meant the assimilation of legal authority to *de facto* power.[26]

Barth's talk of the loss of the imperial ideal is helpful, then. It ought to be noted, though, that it also creates a difficulty. The problem is that the analysis is well suited to the German states, which went through the political changes Barth has described, but has little application to other parts of Europe. The Enlightenment, however, and for that matter political absolutism, were not restricted to Germany nor to lands that were part of the Holy Roman Empire.[27] Barth's identification of the decline of the empire's power as a chief cause of absolutism is problematic, then. In fact the history of the empire was only one element in the emergence of political absolutism. Barth's account is impoverished by its inattention to other factors, such as the socio-economic developments in early modern Europe. He has for example nothing significant to say about the rise of capitalism and the corresponding weakening of the feudal ordering of medieval

[26] It has to be admitted that Barth's phrase "the omnipotence [*Allmacht*] of human powers" is misleading on this point. The substance of his analysis is not affected, though.

[27] Take for example the Scottish Enlightenment, which has increasingly come to be recognized as a genuine and significant branch of the wider European Enlightenment. Note for example MacIntyre's comments in *After Virtue*, 37: "The French themselves often avowedly looked to English models, but England in turn was overshadowed by the achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment. The greatest figures of all were certainly German: Kant and Mozart. But for intellectual variety as well as intellectual range not even the Germans can outmatch David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, John Millar, Lord Kames and Lord Monboddo." On the Scottish Enlightenment see also the comments of Richard B. Sher in *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, Edinburgh, 1985). He suggests (p. 11) that there is no difficulty in seeing the Scottish Enlightenment as part of the wider movement "so long as one does not follow Peter Gay in mistaking the skeptical, anticlerical, reformist Enlightenment of certain French *philosophes* and a few men of letters elsewhere for the Enlightenment as a whole". Gay's views are in *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* 2 vols., (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1967-70). A wider perspective can be found in R. Porter and M. Teich (eds.) *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981).

society.[28] His account would be more broadly based had he placed less weight on the empire, and said more about the demise of feudalism, the loss of faith in a divinely ordained social order in which each had their place, and from which their rights and obligations derived.

This is a significant failing in Barth's account; nonetheless, it does not detract from the usefulness of the points he did in fact make, particularly in the German context. It would do his account an injustice not to note that his redefinition of absolutism has not reduced the concept's relevance to political life; rather it adds to its explanatory power. A good example is that it helps him to explain some of the most characteristic policies of absolutist states such as the development of centralized bureaucracies and the maintenance of standing armies.[29] His suggestion is that idea of an absolute ruler of a geographically limited territory made no sense: "The existence of other territories openly contradicts the idea of an absolute prince, but this state of affairs could be improved by inheritance, by marriage, by acquisition and - the ultimate ratio - by wars of conquest."[30] Territorial rule constitutes at very least a disconfirmation of the idea of the absolute prince; the result is warfare as "a latent principle" of the time. This requires a standing army, which in turn leads to the requirement of a unitary state

[28] Barth discusses these issues very briefly, at p. 43. What he says there is not without value. He notes, for example the rise of the bourgeois middle classes since the late Middle Ages. He also has a rather odd quotation from Goetz op. cit. which suggests that this rise was the result of a deliberate policy on the part of the princes. Barth's relative lack of interest in such matters is surprising in the light of his socialism, perhaps. What makes Barth's omission even more surprising, maybe, is the fact that the breakdown of feudalism is treated so prominently in the operas of his beloved Mozart, and in particular in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. See Nicholas Till *Mozart and the Enlightenment* passim, and especially chapters XII to XV.

[29] An indication of this latter development is given by Charles Ingrao in 'The Smaller German States' in Scott *Enlightened Absolutism*, 225-6: "Virtually every state, no matter how small, maintained at least some troops, if only for ceremonial functions. In a great many instances the military's size corresponded to a principality's needs and resources. Yet more than a few princes were unable to restrain their passion for soldiers. Perhaps there is no better example than Prince William of Schaumburg-Lippe, who condemned military aggression in his memoirs, yet maintained a 1,200-man army in a country of only 20,000 people." Ingrao also makes the point (p. 226) that Frederick "had, after all, been proclaimed 'Great' by contemporary Europeans not for the triumphs of his intellect but for the victories of his army." For fuller description and discussion of the development of standing armies see M.S. Anderson *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime, 1618-1789* (Fontana, London, 1988).

[30] Barth, *PT*, 43. It is worth noting that what Barth says here makes it clear that his understanding of the absolutist prince, while not requiring absolute actual power, requires at least the idea of unlimited power.

which can sustain the commerce to provide the taxation which will pay for this. This need for revenue necessitates the development of a bureaucracy. In this way, Barth offers some explanation of what were widespread developments. In addition, his account provides an explanation for the otherwise puzzling fact that absolutist rulers, even those who pursued extensive policies of social reform and improvement, frequently engaged in aggressive external policies, apparently unmodified by Enlightenment ideals.[31] It is to Barth's credit that he is able to offer a plausible suggestion about these developments.

Another merit in Barth's understanding of absolutism is that it enables him to offer an account of the unity present in the diverse forms of absolute monarchy. He notes the two main types, the "prince by divine right" typified by Louis XIV, and the "enlightened absolutist", of which Frederick the Great is probably the paradigm case.[32] The former expresses itself not only in warfare but in pomp and splendour - Versailles of course is the architectural embodiment of this; it became the model for and inspiration of many other imposing palaces, not least Vienna's Schönbrunn. Enlightened absolutism, on the other hand, is a product of the same principle as this - "through power to power" - but it manifests it "rationally rather than aesthetically".[33] Where the former kind of ruler had "zest for life", the latter has "earnest zeal".[34] The essential feature is social reform, involving for example scientific and technical advance, economic development, and improvements in education.

The more striking step in Barth's analysis, though, is when he discerns a unity not only between these two forms of absolute ruler, but between these and the "revolutionary from below" who came to the fore in France in 1789. Barth envisages this revolutionary as the *alter ego* of the former, "following in his footsteps as inevitably as the darkness follows the light". The citizen,

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[31] See Scott *Enlightened Absolutism*, 25: "Rulers and statesmen who pursued progressive and humanitarian ends at home do not appear, at first sight, to have followed these same principles abroad. ... Any revival of the concept of enlightened absolutism must resolve this difficulty."

[32] In this division, of course, Barth is following the lines established by Roscher.

[33] Barth, *PT*, 45.

[34] Ibid. 46.

who feels himself to have been deprived of his rights, could redress the situation by acquiring power "in order that he might now determine without let of appeal what is right and just".[35] The absolutist principle identifying legal authority with actual power stays the same; it is just that power now lies in different hands. The people assumed statehood "by means of a simple inversion of Louis XIV's dictum".[36] It is interesting to note here that in Barth's view, absolute humanity not only identifies its will with law: "what is right and just" is now also to be determined in this way.

iii. Absolutism and *After Virtue*

Before going on to look at how Barth uses absolutism as the key to other areas of eighteenth century life, it is worth pausing to consider how his account might connect to MacIntyre's narrative. Caution is necessary here, since only a small portion of Barth's discussion is presently in view. Already, though, it is possible to identify an extremely important point of contact between the two analyses. Barth presents the Enlightenment as the product of a set of attitudes and beliefs which derive from the loss of the imperial ideal. This ideal had amounted in effect to the understanding that the social order, and the rights and obligations of those within it, are both limited and grounded by something beyond that social order. What has been lost is a "higher authority".[37] Without such an authority, there is nothing beyond the social order to limit the identification of law, right and justice with the will of the possessor or possessors of effective power.

The important thing to note here is that MacIntyre's narrative, despite its rather different concerns and its distinct subject matter, takes the very same view. It too sees the Enlightenment as the consequence of a loss of previous attitudes and beliefs. It too identifies this as the loss of any grounding for rights and obligations outside the existing social order. Gone is any notion of "human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*"; all that is available

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[35] Barth, *PT*, 48.
[36] Ibid. 48-9.
[37] Ibid. 48.

is "human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be".[38] The only court of appeal is the existing order of things, such as the desires and interests of its members. The common ground that has emerged here between Barth and MacIntyre is of considerable importance. Barth's analysis of absolutism is the key to his understanding of the Enlightenment and its consequences. Likewise MacIntyre's claims regarding the loss of the medieval moral scheme are the centrepiece of his narrative. What has not been established thus far is how Barth develops his account, and in particular whether it parallels MacIntyre's claim about the inevitable failure of the Enlightenment project, given the loss of essential elements of the older scheme.

One interesting possibility is worth mentioning here, though. MacIntyre at one point takes the narrative of *After Virtue* back as far as the Reformation. He notes that early Protestant theologies, and also Jansenist Catholic theology, operated with a new concept of reason. The capacity to comprehend the true end of humanity was understood to have been destroyed by the fall; reason has no power therefore to apprehend ultimate ends, nor to correct our passions. For such theologies, the notion of the human *telos* remained, but it is only grace that enables us to respond to and obey the precepts of divine moral law. MacIntyre sees Pascal as a particularly important figure here, since it was he who first understood the connection between these theologies and the new, non-Aristotelian science, in which reason was no longer expected to "comprehend essences or transitions from potentiality to act", but was essentially "calculative".[39] An important conclusion drawn by Pascal on the basis of this concept of reason

[38] See *After Virtue*, 53-4. The comparison is particularly clear in one or two places where MacIntyre speaks explicitly of the loss of any foundation for morality outside the existing social order. A good example of this is his discussion of English society in the early eighteenth century in chapter XII of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Speaking of rights of property, he says: "there cannot be from the standpoint of this form of social and political order any well-founded appeal ... to a standard of right external to that social and political order, to a standard expressed in principles whose truth would be independent of the attitudes and judgments of the participants in the order." Also: "it would be concluded by an adequately reflective adherent of such an established order that there can be no good reason for appealing to some standard external to the order." (pp. 216-7)

[39] *AV*, 54. Pascal was heavily influenced by Jansenism, spending the latter part of his life in the Jansenist retreat at Port-Royal. It is interesting that two of the early achievements of his life were the disproof of an important proposition of Aristotelian science - that nature abhors a vacuum (by a method which led to the invention of the barometer), and the invention of a calculating machine!

was that human beliefs are ultimately based only on nature, custom and habit. In this, as in his view that reason cannot direct the passions, he is of course an anticipator of (and influence on) Hume; in this way he connects MacIntyre's narrative both to the beginnings of modern science and to pre-Enlightenment theological thought.

There are in fact some very strong parallels here with the account Barth has given of the eighteenth century. The critical thing to notice about MacIntyre's discussion is that there are two elements involved in the loss of the notion of "human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realised-its-*telos*"[40]. Firstly there is the Aristotelian concept of reason as a faculty which can comprehend essences and transitions from potentiality to act - it is the loss of this which MacIntyre concentrates on; but secondly there is the concept of divine grace as able to direct us towards the *telos* of human life in the absence of such a faculty of reason. Only when this is also lost does MacIntyre's narrative take off. He pays little attention to this second loss, though. He does note in passing that Hume had been brought up in a Calvinist environment, and that this has some relevance to his later development. But the loss of the concept of divine grace - also necessary before that philosophical development could occur - is not discussed either in the particular case of Hume or more widely.

What is interesting is that MacIntyre's account is capable of development in directions which he himself does not pursue. He tends to equate the loss of teleological forms of moral reasoning with the loss of Aristotelian structures of enquiry, tying his historical narrative to his own espousal of a revived form of Aristotelianism. But it would equally be possible to give more attention than he does to the other way of sustaining teleological forms, by means of a quite radical notion of divine grace. If this were done, it would be possible to relate his narrative, without any significant modification, to a revived form of Protestant (or even Jansenist) theology. To develop the narrative of *After Virtue* in this way would mean not seeing the loss of end-comprehending reason as the critical loss. Rather, what would matter would be the loss of any standard distinct from actual human willing in the light of

[40] *AV*, 53.

which moral reasoning could operate - whether that standard be provided by Aristotelian reason or divine grace. To use MacIntyre's vocabulary, the critical factor would be the loss of anything other than "human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be";[41] to use Barth's vocabulary it would be the loss of any "higher authority", the loss of "the very notion of a concrete responsibility".[42] What is left is a situation where moral discourse and reasoning can only be rooted in existent human reality: for MacIntyre, Hume's emphasis on custom, habit and the passions is the realization of this; while for Barth, it is the possessor of *de facto* power, whether prince or populace, who determines "what is right and just". To this, Barth has a question: "Does not right cease to be right whenever it is seized? Is not right possible only in a relationship which presupposes peace and excludes the thought of revolution because its basis is a commandment?"[43] Barth's point here is the same one made by MacIntyre when he identified an incoherence in the notion of morality as something authoritative, yet which we can either choose or reject.

iv. The will for form

Barth moves on from the political realm, with the conviction that it has shown us the century "most clearly as a whole".[44] His attention turns to the influence of absolutism in social and cultural life. He divides his treatment between two aspects, which he calls the inner and outer forms of life. By the outer form he means the constant element in the cultural aims and achievements of the era. By the inner form he means the recurrent and characteristic attitudes of individuals toward themselves, the world, and God. The outer form of life of the eighteenth century, the constant among the diverse cultural achievements of the age, is identified by Barth as "a striving to reduce everything to an absolute form".[45] In the natural world, in dress and manners, in the built environment, in music, in language, in the

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41 *AV*, 53.

42 Barth, *PT*, 48.

43 Ibid. 52. Note that the reference to revolution covers both the princely and the popular absolutist. Barth sees the former as the revolutionary from above, the latter as the revolutionary from below.

44 Ibid. 54.

45 Ibid. 55.

social world, in the understanding of the individual, in individual development - in all these areas the repeated pattern is the desire to impose form on a mass of raw material. The inhabitant of the period "believes himself to be the master" of this unformed matter, confronting it as one "who has all the knowledge: knowledge of the form, the intrinsically right, fitting, worthy, beautiful form".[46] This pattern of the imposition of form on raw matter is worked out by Barth in each of the areas mentioned above.

In its relationship with nature, eighteenth century culture had an aesthetic as well as a scientific aspect. But the character of its aesthetics was to impose form in accordance with human sensibility, and so idealize nature - the order and harmony (which come down largely to geometry, in Barth's view) of the gardens of the period is well known.[47] In the architecture of the period a similar will for form is evident. Barth is struck by the tendency to use materials in a way which does not manifest the character of the material, but which imposes a logical form on space. He notes in particular the fondness for the use of plaster, "so obedient to the forming hand!"[48] The town planning of the period also expressed the same character, the imposition of form not according to the natural features of the land, but as an expression of a form "held significant and valuable enough to justify its projection into the materials, regardless of everything in them contrary to its own nature".[49] The age in fact put its own spirit into the built environment as no other age had done, comments Barth. But this was inevitable, since the age's "inmost heart *was* precisely this idea of man as one taking hold of everything about him and subjecting it to his will".[50] Barth applies these categories also to the characteristic fashions in dress and manners. The ornamented and grand fashions of the age conveyed the message that: "man carries in his soul an image of himself which in comparison with his actual figure is still much more noble, much more graceful and much more

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[46] Barth, *PT*, 55.

[47] Barth also mentions the representation of nature in the decorative arts, commenting on the "tamed, groomed and trained animals, shepherds and shepherdesses whose nice prettiness and grace really left them no alternative but to turn eventually into those little porcelain figures" (ibid. 55).

[48] Ibid. 56.

[49] Ibid. 56.

[50] Ibid. 56-7.

perfect".[51] Great dignity and charm were certainly achieved, but this imposition of form on appearance and presentation was paid for by "burdens and discomforts"!

Barth turns next to the question of the century's attitude towards history. The notable feature is that this was the period in which the critical study of history began. The eighteenth century historian regarded the past from a point of view of conscious superiority. History was allowed no independent power to speak to the historian. It was inevitably classified either as light or dark. Again, then, the task is to impose form on the raw material offered. There is no question of the material challenging the one who forms it.

Education took on a new significance in the eighteenth century - there was a new estimation of what education could achieve: Barth quotes Franke's view that education could bring the young person to "true godliness and Christian wisdom".[52] The century's confidence in its understanding of the child and its ability to educate and shape it is, in Barth's view, one of the most notable examples of the will for form. State schooling and compulsory education were developments which arose from this new thinking, and they inevitably led to the increasing independence of education from the Church.

The forming of associations, and the relationship between these and older social institutions, is next to be discussed. The distinction here is really between obligatory institutions, one's membership of which is more a matter of necessity than choice,[53] and associations which one chooses freely to enter into. The former came increasingly to be seen as only the visible sign of community, rather than its true expression. Instead it came to be believed that "association could be created, and indeed that association in its true and really living sense had to be created."[54] The older, obligatory institutions are to some extent usurped by this new understanding of and

[51] Barth, *PT*, 57.
[52] Ibid. 60.
[53] Barth mentions as examples "the natural communion of marriage and family life, the professional association of the guild and the corporation, and the associations, partly geographical, partly political, of the village, the township and the state. Embracing all the others, and not so much formed as instituted, the community of the Church, and that of the empire too". Ibid. 62.
[54] Ibid. 62-3.

desire for community. Again for Barth this development is an expression of the impulse to impose form on malleable raw material. Not even social institutions are immune from the desire and need to give to all that presents itself a form and shape in accordance with human understanding and choice. This elevation of free association is of course related to the political developments of the age, for now the state is reinvented as a free association of individuals.[55] As for examples of this new impulse towards association, the order of Freemasons is perhaps the most obvious one, but Barth mentions others such as the Rosicrucians, societies for the furtherance of knowledge, student associations and, not least, the Moravian brethren.[56]

In language, literature and poetry, Barth notes the development of a desire to give literary and poetic form to the vernacular, rather than the classical languages of antiquity. Again this is seen as an expression of the will for form, operative on a mass of raw material which had begun to become a source of shame in and because of its unmoulded state. But it is in the music of the period that Barth finds the most intimate communication of the absolutism of the age. He points out that music was understood more as a craft than as an art, and one which consisted primarily in the technical mastery of musical instruments. Composition was essentially a means to this end of proficiently played music. Successful musical composition was not the expression of the self, but the expression of laws:

> Not sensibility, not experience, not mystique and not Protestantism, but art as a skill, as proficiency in the manipulation of the most exacting rules - not without 'invention', certainly, as it was then called, but invention

[55] Barth, *PT*, 50. Barth states that the French National Assembly in its Statement of Human and Civil Rights "is explicit in taking the state to be an *association*".

[56] This is a convenient point to note that the views expressed in these lectures were at many points a development of ideas Barth had already used at an earlier date in theological lectures and publications. This is important, given that my discussion of Barth's theology concentrates on the period up to around 1924, while these lectures date from 1929 to 1933. Here, the point I want to note is that in a lecture first delivered in Lübeck on 30th November 1923, Barth noted that the visible church has the form of a free society of individuals; however he denied that this is the character of the true Church. The true Church is grounded in the event of revelation, not in the possession of a common religious interest. Moreover Barth argued in that lecture that the character of the Church changed significantly in the eighteenth century, with the Enlightenment. In the seventeenth century the Church had, he suggests, still understood that it is founded in divine judgement. The lecture is 'Die Kirche und die Offenbarung', subsequently published in the Gesamtausgabe volume *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925* (Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1990), 307-349. Bruce McCormack discussed this lecture in *A Scholastic of a Higher Order* 267-71.

> continually inventing a new necessity, inventing not so much in the expression of what the composer himself found personally stimulating, but rather of general laws - this was needed to write a fugue.[57]

The mastery sought by the eighteenth century musician involved belief in their sovereignty over the musical instrument and over the range of possible sounds it could produce. They therefore had a particular fondness for polyphonic instruments and music - paradigmatically, of course, the music of the keyboard instruments. It was a matter of ordering the "rough amorphous mass of possible sounds", of "evolving harmony from the confused mass of possible combinations of sounds"[58] all in accordance with laws of form, which are in a sense known to each individual human being; but skillful and inventive application of these laws was the mark, not of genius, but of the master of the art.

All that went into the music of the period was directed towards flawless playing. Beauty was not something which inhered in the music itself, but rather followed from the work of the craftsman performed skillfully. It was a beauty which "consisted in the freedom founded upon subjection to the law".[59] Earlier music had not achieved the same mastery in subjecting the raw material to laws; later music, from Beethoven on, did not have the same love for the world of sound in itself, and so was not capable of "looking upon it in the same unequivocal way as a game".[60] But the "music of absolutism" simply plays, and in so doing achieves a peculiar and unmatched beauty. It is interesting that Barth not only seeks to apply the notion of the will for form to the subject of music; he actually suggests that here absolutism, the origin of that will, is at its utmost extreme. For he suggests that this music "sought to emulate the wisdom even of the Creator in its results and in the abandonment and superiority which cause us to forget all the craftsmanship behind it". Support for this comes from a comment of Goethe about the music of J.S. Bach: "As if the eternal harmony were discoursing with itself, as might perhaps have happened in the bosom of the Lord, just before the Creation; so I was moved inwardly and felt that I

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[57] Barth, *PT*, 70.
[58] Ibid. 71.
[59] Ibid. 72.
[60] Ibid. 72.

no longer needed ears, nor eyes the least of all, nor any other senses."[61] This, which Barth suggests is the most profound comment on Bach it would be possible to make, relates to Proverbs 8:27-31, where it is said that the Wisdom of God is beside God in the act of creation, like a master craftsman, "playing always before him".[62] So, while it was the political life of the century that most clearly showed its character as a whole, it is the music of the period that is the purest and most extreme expression of absolutism.[63]

This, then, is Barth's attempt to describe the outer form of life of the century. The will for form, seen as the outgrowth of absolutism, is the constant element through all these diverse areas of culture and life. The attempt is certainly impressive; his identifications of the presence of the will for form are generally plausible and powerful. To have the same pattern discerned and displayed for the reader in so many areas of culture has the effect of reinforcing each individual instance. Closely linked to this material is Barth's discussion of what he calls the inner form of life of the period. It is central to Barth's discussion of the inner form that it corresponds accurately with the outer. The characteristic understanding of self, world, and God, reflects the absolute will for form evident in cultural and social life.

Fundamental to Barth's analysis of the inner form is the idea of human freedom over against and mastery of the non-human. The self-awareness of the period involves a conviction of the superiority of the human to the non-human, and the freedom of the human in this relationship. The world therefore is understood as the scene prepared and set ready for human action. Belief in God is conditioned by this. God is understood to be the absolute perfection of those qualities of goodness and wisdom which are present in and so important to the human self-awareness of the period. The belief in this God is sustained by wonderment at the suitability of the world as material to be formed and mastered by humanity. Linked to this is the conviction that the world, like humanity, is the creation of God; therefore a correct understanding of the world will tell us about the will of God, about

61 Barth, *PT*, 72.

62 Ibid. 72.

63 cf. MacIntyre *After Virtue*, 37, speaking explicitly of the eighteenth century: "It was a musical culture and there was perhaps a closer relationship between this fact and the central philosophical problems of the culture than has usually been recognized."

what goodness and virtue consist in. Reason is the "elemental voice" speaking to humanity, both subjectively and objectively, from within and from without. Therefore we must "allow Nature (and this is within our power) to tell us what is good".[64] Barth suggests that this inner attitude to life is permeated by absolutism to the extent which it assumes that humanity can ask these questions and answer them itself. The self-understanding of the age does not doubt for a moment that it is capable of all this. Barth sees this as a revival, in a new form, of the humanism of the Renaissance, and prior to that the philosophy of Stoicism.[65] The essence of this humanism is that "the perfect life consisted in the complete autarchy of rational man in a rational world on the basis of the existence and dominion of a Deity guaranteeing this association and thus too man's complete autarchy".[66] This humanism has the power to answer all questions - even, and in particular, it must and can attempt a theodicy and, more fundamentally, an anthropodicy. Leibnitz therefore is the purest of the humanists of the period.

This theme, obviously, is more directly relevant than the discussion of the outer form of life to Barth's basic concern - the background to theological history. One might wonder, in fact, why a study of the history of theology should concern itself with architecture, manners and music at all. It would, however, be a mistake to think of the discussion of the outer form as of secondary importance, preparatory material leading towards the genuinely relevant matter. In seeking to open up the eighteenth century to view, Barth has sought a principle which will apply to all aspects of the life of the century, and in absolutism he believes he has found it. Absolutism is valuable to Barth because it applies to political, social, cultural and intellectual life, across the board. If it did not apply to architecture, manners and music, it would not be the fundamental principle of the period, and there would be no reason to suppose it would be particularly relevant to religion and theology. The comprehensiveness of Barth's account is therefore essential to it; and an appreciation of that comprehensiveness is essential to any account of Barth's narrative.

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[64] Barth, *PT*, 75.
[65] Ibid. 76-7.
[66] Ibid. 76.

In considering the outer and inner forms of life, Barth has described two related ways in which absolutism is expressed: firstly, in the will for form; secondly, in the conviction that man is "linked with, and ultimately of the same substance as" God.[67] This enables us to see more completely what it is that Barth means by absolutism. The idea that this period of history was characterized by belief in the omnipotence of human powers was given content in political history by the idea that political and legal authority was something that originated not outwith the human, but in the effective will of the possessor of power. Now, this same notion of belief in the omnipotence of human powers is applied by means of the idea that all that humanity encounters in its social and cultural existence has to and can be created and formed by means of that same effective will. The will for form is, it should not be forgotten, the will for *absolute* form - that is to say, the will to impose a form determined absolutely by humanity. The effective human will can and must determine the shape of that which it encounters, whether it be political structures and codes of law, the world of possible sounds, or the built environment. The effective will gives forms which reflect and display the fact that they have been imposed by an absolute will: the layout of towns and cities, the sound of a prelude and fugue, the apparel of a fashionable, well to do citizen - all these could have served as examples of human contrivance every bit as well as as the watch which Archdeacon Paley asked his readers to imagine they had found upon the ground, at the beginning of his argument for the existence of God.[68] All these expressed and exclaimed that they were the creation of beings which have knowledge of the "right, fitting, worthy, beautiful form"[69] and, of course, the skill and craftsmanship to realise that form. The idea of "man as one taking hold of everything about him and subjecting it to his will"[70] is the one which unites the analysis of political life with the analysis of the inner and outer forms of life of the century.

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[67] Barth, *PT*, 74. It is necessary to raise a question mark about this, since Barth later (p. 131) says that the century, to be consistent, *would* have adopted pantheism or panentheism, though it in fact resisted this preferring a deistic understanding of God.
[68] William Paley *Natural Theology* 1802. Quoted in J. Hick (ed.) *The Existence of God* (Macmillan, London, 1964), 99 f.
[69] Barth, *PT*, 55.
[70] Ibid. 57.

v. The treatment of Christianity in the eighteenth century

Having completed this general discussion, Barth does not turn straight away to the theology of the eighteenth century. Rather he offers a lengthy discussion of what he calls the problem of theology.[71] He means this in the sense of the subject matter of theology. The chapter is, broadly speaking, about the religious life of the period. Barth considers how religion fared in the light of the eighteenth century's distinctive attitudes and concerns. He asks how the consciousness of the period treated the Bible, the Church, and the faith of the Church. The core of his answer is, perhaps not surprisingly, derived from the preceding chapter: the prevailing attitudes, he argues, were the product of absolutism. Therefore the "attitude towards Christianity at first proves to be just one further instance of his attitude to life in general".[72] That is his first point. His second point, though, is that there is nonetheless a difference here, as compared to the other aspects of life examined already. The difference is that here absolutism meets a subject matter which offers it some resistance. The absolutist approach to Christianity "succeeds only partially". We see the absolutist "hesitate and stumble at various points".[73]

This second point is of the utmost importance for Barth's whole argument. The absolutist approach to Christianity is an attempt humanize it, to bring it under control, to impose on it a form determined by human powers. The humanization of the subject-matter had to mean "the incorporation of God into the sphere of sovereign human self-awareness, the transformation of the reality that came and was to be perceived from outside into a reality that was to be perceived and understood inwardly."[74] But the subject-matter of theology seems somehow to make a claim to have an authority over against humanity, an authority "set over against men, an authority that is different from men".[75] Such an authority, of course, could not be recognized on the basis of absolutism, with its faith in the omnipotence of human powers. Barth suggests that the whole absolutist scheme is challenged by this

[71] *PT* Chapter 3 "The Problem of Theology in the Eighteenth Century".
[72] Ibid. 81.
[73] Ibid. 81.
[74] Ibid. 84.
[75] Ibid. 83.

difficulty. If absolutism cannot be realized here, it will fail, despite its successes elsewhere. If it cannot succeed here, the omnipotence of the human asserted elsewhere will be seen to be a sham.

Barth describes the treatment of Christianity in terms of four related developments. He characterizes these as: "the attempt ... to humanize the problem of theology by its incorporation into (1) the state; (2) morality and the bourgeoisie; (3) science and philosophy; (4) inwardness and the individual."[76] With regard to the first of these, the incorporation of Christianity into the state, Barth argues that the eighteenth century was the high point of the history of Caesaro-papism. The state, understanding its own will to have the power of absolute law, treats the Christianity practised within its territory as subject to its sovereignty. The critical development was not, Barth argues, the theory of the supreme episcopacy of the ruler, or the Calvinistic view of the collaboration of secular authority in church affairs. Rather he points to territorialism and collegialism, both of which denied the Church any independence from the state. Barth notes that the absolute state can declare its religious principle to be the salvation of each in their own fashion. The relativity of confessions was a truth declared by political rulers "long before the theologians succeeded in struggling towards this or a similar wisdom."[77] Alternatively it can adopt one confession and make it effectively obligatory on all citizens. Such actions were not, either, imposed against the will of the churches. The net effect, though, was that the Church and the matters it was concerned with were understood as being under human authority.

Secondly, Barth discusses the incorporation of Christianity into morality and the bourgeoisie. The eighteenth century was very much aware of the wars of religion that had occurred in the aftermath of the Reformation, culminating in the Thirty Years' War, and of the devastation caused. There was a determination that such events should never be permitted to recur. To that end, there developed "the theory of the barrenness, indeed the danger of theological theory".[78] There was a common perception that the error of the

[76] Barth, *PT*, 85.
[77] Ibid. 87.
[78] Ibid. 93.

past, the error that had to be avoided, was to have understood Christianity as an intellectual matter, a set of doctrines:

> the Christian citizen of the eighteenth century ... thinks that he can see the mistake which crept in during all those dark times: the way in which people understood the Christian creed then was wrong, perverse and evil. ... The supreme verities of faith had been robbed of their real content and had been changed into barren theological maxims whose contradictions inevitably aroused the direst passions.[79]

The correct understanding of Christianity, in the eyes of the century, was as "not teaching, but life". Or, at least, in so far as Christianity is a teaching, is must be understood only as teaching for life. The real meaning of Christianity is the transformation of life: "It demands of us a changed, a transformed life, and that alone can be the 'true' faith with which we are to respond if we are really to be called Christians."[80] What this amounts to in practice is the adaptation of Christianity to bourgeois life.

This notion of the transformation of life is, Barth argues, at the root of both of the notable developments in the religious life of the century - pietism and rationalism.[81] Pietism, designated the inner line of this bourgeois development, applies the notion of the transformation of life as a hermeneutical rule - in biblical interpretation it emphasizes notions such as rebirth, conversion, faith active in love, repentance etc. Rationalism, on the other hand, the outer line of this development, sees the transformation of life not as a hermeneutic rule but as the text that has to be read. It is the real message, and Bible, dogma and Church must find their place in relation to it. For rationalism, true worship of God consists in or, at very least, is made manifest in the transformation and improvement of life, in "struggles against unreason and depravity, in steady practice of the Christian duties

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[79] Barth, *PT*, 92.

[80] Ibid. 93.

[81] Thus Barth makes good a promise made a little earlier - he stated at pp. 84-5 that he follows Baur and Ritschl rather than Troeltsch and others, in that he sees Pietism and Enlightenment rationalism as related developments, both connected with the main trends of the life of the period.

and virtues".[82] The intention, note, was not to avoid or reject orthodox belief. Yet the emphasis is all on the improvement of life, and so a subtle undermining of the creed takes place. Pietists and rationalists are united in this emphasis on life. They differ principally in that the former favour inner works while the latter favour outer improvement. Barth presents them both as opposing not only a quietistic doctrine of justification, but also the genuine interpretation of the reformers. He suggests that they depend more on Stoicism than on scripture. Again, absolutism and the will for form are present. Form now means morality "in the most comprehensive sense of the concept".[83] The critical thing about this is that when it is understood as morality, Christianity is subject to human power. Barth here makes a comment which reveals something of the significance of this development for him: moralism, he says, has outlasted the period. Even in his own day, "Christianity means moralistic, bourgeois Christianity, or it does not mean Christianity at all. It can have a pietistic or a rationalistic colouring, but whatever happens it must be a *praxis pietatis.*"[84] This is one point, then, at which Barth's implicit desire to understand the present in and through an

[82] Barth, *PT*, 94-5. As an example of such piety, Barth mentions a volume of 'Village Sermons' published in 1792 by a pastor, one Traugott Günther Röller, and dedicated to the Archduke of Weimar. An example of their character is that the Easter sermon was on 'Reasonable Rules for the Christian Burial of Corpses' - motto: 'Ne'er speed the body underground, in case within some life be found'. ibid. 96.

[83] Ibid. 99.

[84] Ibid. 100.

understanding of the past becomes explicit.[85]

Thirdly, Barth discusses the attempt to incorporate Christianity into science and philosophy. He reiterates that the criticism of Bible, Church and dogma was not central to the treatment of the the problem of theology; the retreat of religion into a circumscribed 'natural' religion in the face of historico-critical attack was not the most basic feature of the period. Such developments need to be seen in context. This is provided by the two aspects of the treatment of the problem of theology already discussed: the state and bourgeois morality. The two most basic categories which determined attitudes to religion were those of citizen and moralist. Criticism of and philosophizing of Christianity were consequent upon these categories. Why, though, were such consequences as criticism and doubt so prevalent? Barth has already stated that moralism does not lead inevitably to the criticism of Bible and dogma. He suggests, then, that the reason lies in the failure of the moralistic

[85] This theme of moralism is something else which reflects Barth's thinking in a much earlier period. It can be traced right back to his disillusionment with the activism of Leonhard Ragaz in 1915. In a letter to Martin Rade of 19th June 1915, Barth criticises the priority given to the question 'What should we do?'. (See *B–R. Br. I.* 134. Quoted by McCormack, *CRDT*, 124.) In a letter to Thurneysen of 6th August that year, he repeats this criticism, suggesting that this question, with its "plunge into ethics", in fact "avoids the real subject-matter". (See *B–Th. Br. I.* 69-70.) I would suggest that we have here the root of Barth's criticism of moralism, the attempt to make Christianity subject to human will by elevating life over doctrine. Another illustration of this can be found in his address 'The Righteousness of God' delivered in January 1916. There Barth speaks in terms which prefigure his description of absolutism's treatment of Christianity, its attempt to place it under the control of human will:

> "We are inwardly resentful that the righteousness we pant after is God's and can come to us only from God. We should like to take the mighty thing into our own hands and under our own management, as we have done with so many other things. It seems quite desirable that the righteousness without which we cannot exist should be controlled by our own will, whatever kind of will that may really be. We arrogate to ourselves, unquestioningly, the right to take up the tumultuous question, What shall we *do?* as if that were in any case the first and most pressing problem." (*WGWM*, 15-16.)

Note how the attempt to place religion under the control of human will is linked to moralism, and this in an address dating from some sixteen years before the lectures under consideration here. Also interesting is the fact that Barth and Thurneysen began to study Pietism seriously during the second half of the War. They found its centre to be this same question, 'What shall we do?', and therefore began to see Religious Socialism as a new form of this Pietism. Thurneysen makes this connection in a letter to Barth of 12 December 1917. (See *B–Th. Br. I.* 249.) Note that Barth's relation to Pietism has been fully explored in Eberhard Busch *Karl Barth und die Pietisten: Die Pietismuskritik des jungen Karl Barth und ihre Erwiderung* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich, 1978). Busch makes clear that Barth's father Fritz was strongly influenced by Pietism, and valued particularly its emphasis on life rather than doctrine.

interpretation of Christianity to succeed in its self-appointed task: that of transforming life, and presenting the humanity of the period as sanctified.[86] Even in the optimism of the period, few, says Barth, thought that what had been achieved or could be achieved was a realization of Christianity. There was a resignation here, which led Pietism towards mysticism, and rationalism towards utilitarianism. This recognition of the difficulty of setting oneself up as sanctified, this recognition of limitation, so painful for absolutism, issued also in the thought that Christianity had been perhaps misunderstood, and that there was a truer Christianity still waiting to be discovered. It would be a more original, more genuine Christianity - but it would have to be dug out from below the layers of dogma and tradition which had caused the problem.

Barth makes some trenchant criticisms of these developments. He likens the relationship between the moralistic principle and Christianity to the relation between an axiom and a tenet grounded on it.[87] One is held absolutely, the other relatively. Christianity is held at a distance, able to be presented and affirmed in a variety of ways. It is affirmed but only "with a secret sovereignty which already seemed to make it questionable whether what was being affirmed was still Christianity. Perhaps Christianity cannot be affirmed in this way."[88] The way forward, for moralism, involved an attempt to "knock all the corners off" this old Christianity which is simply

[86] Barth, *PT*, 101. "Probably because it does not completely succeed in reaching the reality for which it longs so much, it must in turn manage to confirm that it is at least the truth. Thereupon there arises the new, critical, philosophical theory of Christianity. Psychologically speaking, abstract theories of Christianity, whether they are positive or critical, traditional or neological, are always a compensation for an actual (albeit at times very hidden) deficiency in Christian practice. Unless we see this connexion, we shall look in vain for the real pathos of the eighteenth century's criticism of Bible and dogma, its philosophizing of Christianity."

[87] It is interesting to note that Barth's lecture "The First Commandment as Axiom in Theology" dates from 1933 - shortly after this lecture would have been given. It was first delivered on 10th March 1933, and first published in *Zwischen den Zeiten* vol. 11 (1933), 297-314. ET in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth; Essays and Comments* ed. H.M. Rumscheidt, (Pickwick, Pennsylvania, 1986). For discussion of this lecture see H.M. Rumscheidt 'The First Commandment as Axiom For Theology: A Model for the Unity of Dogmatics and Ethics' in *Theology Beyond Christendom* ed. J. Thompson, (Pickwick, Pennsylvania, 1986). Hitler's regime had come to power on 30th January, at which point, Barth later commented, he was occupied with Rousseau, i.e. two chapters further on. There cannot have been more than three or four months between this material here being delivered and the delivery of that lecture. It is not impossible, then, that there is a connection in Barth's thinking. See also Busch, *Karl Barth*, 224.

[88] Barth, *PT*, 105.

"too crude" as it stands.[89] Elements in the Bible or dogma which offended were explained away, or perhaps accorded a different status - as mysteries. They could then be retained in the liturgy and the hymn book without entering into preaching or instruction.[90] Again, here, Barth makes a reference to the relevance of this trend beyond the eighteenth century: the culmination of this concern to make Christianity fit for society, he suggests, is the work of Albrecht Ritschl.[91] Christianity turned itself into a philosophy, the chief characteristics of which were: an identification between God's action and the principle of providence, of which revelation, reconciliation etc. are modes of appearance; an understanding of Christ as an enlightened and enlightening teacher; a view of the Church as a religious society; an understanding of salvation as a realizable path from imperfection to perfection; a rejection of the notion of hell and a spiritualized doctrine of the immortality of the human soul. And as before Barth finds that Stoicism is the standard by which all is actually being measured.

Fourthly, Barth deals with the incorporation of Christianity into inwardness and individualism. By individualization, Barth means "making inward, the making inward of what is external, objective to man, by which it is robbed of its objectivity, so to speak eaten up and digested, made into something within man. ... Individualization means appropriation of the object to be the purpose of his domination."[92] Equally, this can be characterized as externalization - the projection of the human outward until the object is identified with it. This characterization of the period is in fact for Barth the "pure form of the general tendency of the time".[93] Moreover while this pure form found expression in the moralism and Caesaro-papism of the eighteenth century, it also, in Pietism, has the form of individualism. Here, though, the resistance of Christianity to this absolutist treatment comes into play powerfully. Absolutist individualism cannot tolerate the externality and objectivity of the central element of the creed - the incarnation. The

89 Barth, *PT*, 107.

90 Ibid. 109. Note MacIntyre *After Virtue*,37: "the relationship of our beliefs to sentences that we only or primarily sing, let alone to the music which accompanies those centuries, is not at all the same as the relationship of our beliefs to the sentences that we primarily say and say in an assertive mode."

91 Barth, *PT*, 107.

92 Ibid. 113.

93 Ibid. 113.

temporal distance cannot be tolerated. The reality of the incarnation must be made present reality: "The real birth of Christ is in our hearts; his real and saving death is that which we see accomplished in ourselves, that which we have to accomplish ourselves".[94] Barth distinguishes this from the Reformers' doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which he says does not abolish the temporal distance, since the Spirit is still an objective presence. Interiorization, on the other hand, loses interest in history. An example of this tendency is Zinzendorf's calling Christ the supreme elder of his community of brethren. Barth even suggests that this interiorization, this abolition of temporal distance, is prefigured in the late orthodox doctrine of the verbal inspiration of scripture.

This was not, though, the only aspect of Christianity which resisted absolutist appropriation. Barth suggests that Pietist individualism was unable to tolerate the particularity of the human individual. It could only envisage the Church as a community of brethren, formed by free association. The otherness of particular individuals had to be neutralized by reinventing them as brethren. A third element unacceptable to individualism was the notion of an authority external to and over against the individual. A fourth was the notion of divine command. The Protestant view of this, he says, is of a particular command, not a general one, such that there is no room left for interpretation; the only room left is for the choice between obedience and disobedience. By making the command a general rule, however, the individualist interiorizes the law.[95] A fifth and final element resisting assimilation was the concept of sacrament or mystery. It was essential that this should become a comprehensible mystery. It therefore was internalized: "individualism meant that man discovered the mystery within himself: he himself becomes the invisible sign of invisible grace".[96]

In an important passage for later sections of the lectures, Barth then considers the sense in which, in the light of all this, and in spite of all his previous qualifications, 'reason' can yet be called the normative

[94] Barth, *PT*, 115.
[95] Note the emphasis on the particularity of the divine command in Barth's own ethics. See especially *CD* II/2, Chapter VIII.
[96] Barth, *PT*, 121.

characteristic of the century. He suggests that while limits to human understanding and willing were seen and acknowledged (and to this extent limits to the power of reason were acknowledged) at the same time what lies beyond those limits is within human capacity to shape and command. There is a second, wider sense of the term 'reason' here, and within this wider notion, mystery has its place. Humanity discovers that it "is capable not only of understanding and willing, but also of feeling, experiencing and undergoing".[97] There is an "expanded inner room" in which mystery in general, and the Christian mystery in particular, can be accommodated. Barth then concludes his discussion of individualism by emphasizing the importance of Pietism (as the classic embodiment of the century's individualism) as a forerunner of the later individualism of the age of Goethe and Romanticism.

All that remains to be said about the treatment of Christianity in this century is to note again that the attempt to humanize Christianity was only a partial success. Its influence extends to subsequent ages but there have at least been developments beyond the approach attempted then. Barth tries to pinpoint some of the reasons for this. First he suggests, without specifying very clearly what he means, that a greater self-confidence than was actually present would have been required if absolutism were to be effective on Christianity. Secondly he points to conflict between different expressions of the absolutist will: between the state church and individualism; between the state church and moralism; between moralism and individualism; between moralism and intellectualism. Thirdly he notes that the Bible continued to be widely read during the century. This in itself he considers sufficient to count against the humanization of Christianity. Fourthly he argues that certain elements of dogma survived in the eighteenth century, and by their presence offered resistance to the whole attempt at humanization. He identifies the characteristic doctrine of God of the period as such an item: its deistic quality preserved the distinction between God and humanity. He points also to the Pietistic doctrine of justification: the stress on the blood and wounds of Christ as the place of salvation retained a hint of a scheme different from the pervasive 'Pelagianism'. Fifthly he identifies a shadow of

[97] Barth, *PT*, 121.

a genuine eschatology: in so far as immortality was a tenet of even the most rationalized religion, there was the preservation of something beyond, something outwith human power, something in which they could only believe. Even though this belief was largely an expression of absolutist optimism, it still retained a link with a different view.

vi. Theology in the eighteenth century

After all this Barth turns to the work of the theologians.[98] The striking aspect of his discussion is that the most important thing has, in a sense, already been said: the developments in the life of the Church during the eighteenth century, the treatment of Christianity, the characteristic understanding of Christian faith during this century - all these were shaped decisively by the absolutism evident in the whole culture and life of the period. In other words, the theologians did not have a determinative relationship to the life of the Church and the treatment and understanding of Christian faith. They were not leading and shaping; they were following where others led:

> the theology of the eighteenth century moved in the general direction of its time, though rather behind that time, so that while in an absolute sense its movement was very vigorous, theology was always in a relative sense rather obsolete and old-fashioned.[99]

There were, in this century, many theologians worthy of respect. But theology always seemed to be having to come to terms with developments outside it; moreover it always seemed to be slow to respond - Barth lists how at each stage of development theology was one step behind the changes it was appropriating.[100] Irrespective, then, of the ability and scholarship of the theologians of the period, their theology did not guide the Church. They were not "guardians and prophets" for the Church. Barth incidentally casts his eye forward again at this point, suggesting that this was also the case in the nineteenth century. Such a situation forces him to the acknowledgement that "on a purely historical level we have hit on one of the hardest and most grievous problems in the history of recent

98 *PT* Chapter 4 "Protestant Theology in the Eighteenth Century"
99 Ibid. 136.
100 Ibid. 137.

theology".[101] At no previous time in the history of the Protestant Church, not even in its worst moments, has theology handed over the Church to the cultural forces of the time. But from the end of orthodoxy onwards "the wagons begin to skid"![102]

Barth's emphasis on the importance of this development must be taken with the utmost seriousness. I would suggest that it is in fact the key to the pattern which organizes and gives significance to the whole narrative. Barth believes that in the eighteenth century, the relationship between Christian theology and the Christian Church changed. It is this change which concerns him, for it determines the subsequent history of theology in important ways. Moreover it is in order to identify and describe this change adequately that Barth's treatment of the eighteenth century takes the surprising form that it does, discussing the political and cultural life of the period so fully.

With the hindsight provided by this crucial point in the narrative, it is now possible to describe more clearly the pattern organizing the material covered so far. The critical factor for understanding the theology of the nineteenth century, Barth believes, is the relationship between theology and the Church. Theology no longer guides the Church - it has surrendered the momentum to other forces in society and culture. This surrender can actually be traced, however, to the eighteenth century. Essential, therefore, is an examination of the eighteenth century which must do two things: (i) it must identify the significant trend or trends in the life of the period, showing that it or they genuinely are determinative of the various aspects of life, and explaining, as far as possible, why such a trend or trends developed; (ii) it must show that this trend (or trends) was also determinative of the treatment and understanding of the Church and its faith. When these two tasks have been completed, and only then, can the claim be made that the life of the Church has been shaped and led by something external to it. It will then be possible to claim that the relationship between the Church and theology has changed in the way indicated. These

101 Barth, *PT*, 137.
102 Ibid. 138.

two tasks are precisely what Barth has undertaken to this point.[103] With this pattern in view, it becomes clear that the sheer breadth of Barth's discussion is not really the result of a general methodological principle. It serves a very specific function: to demonstrate how the relation between theology and the Church has changed, and what it is that now leads and guides the Church.

What, though, of the eighteenth century's theologians? Barth's comments on individual writers mainly serve to illustrate aspects of the analysis already provided. They are not any less important for that, though. To begin with, Barth finds in many of them a great emphasis on life and practice. Samuel Wernfels, Professor in Basle, was typical of this - Barth says he accepted the validity of dogma "in its principal concern". This principal concern he identified as "that part of the Bible and dogma, of course, which related to practice and could be translated into practice".[104] Another theme Barth seeks to illustrate here is his insistence that the rationalist critique of orthodoxy was motivated by moralism rather than intellectualism. He quotes, by way of support, the opinion of Karl Aner (whom he otherwise is very critical of) in discussion of the so-called neologists: "One cannot understand neology if one characterizes it in a predominantly intellectualistic way. Its criticism of dogma is not born of reason, but of ethical and personal needs."[105]

An important point that Barth wants to make about the neologists is that they were not, in his view, the first genuine innovators in the century. This had been the view of Troeltsch and others. This is no small matter for Barth - it betrays differences in the fundamental analysis of the developments of the period. Open criticism of dogma and the Bible certainly was not greatly evident in the earlier part of the century; but Barth finds important changes in many theologians who remained fairly orthodox on the surface. A particularly significant example of this is J.A. Turrettini. Barth notes that there was in him "hardly any perceptible break from dogma"; however his

[103] It is worth noting with regard to Barth's objection to the publication of a selection of chapters, that the selection which Barth objected to in 1959 included Chapter 2, 'Man in the Eighteenth Century', but not Chapters 3 and 4. See *From Rousseau to Ritschl*. Bearing in mind the close relationship of each of these three chapters to the others in the scheme outlined, Barth's lack of enthusiasm for that selection is not hard to understand.

[104] Barth, *PT*, 145.

[105] Ibid. 165. Barth's criticism of Aner is that like Troeltsch and others he ascribes too much importance to the neologists.

affirmations are made with a "completely different theological attitude".[106] What this amounts to is that "dogma, and in dogma Christianity, is really an academic opinion".[107] Similarly, Barth notes that in the work of J.F. Osterwald, "the dogma stands and is held to be valid essentially in its old extent and wording, yet it is presented in a context and with a stress that tend to make its meaning questionable and therefore its validity dubious".[108] Again, there is the Wolffian 'orthodoxy' of such theologians as J. Carpov and S.J. Baumgarten, which claimed to proceed on the basis of revelation but which identified a balancing sphere for reason alongside it. Barth believed that despite the professed basis in revelation, such theology was "quite divorced from the event that bears this designation".[109] The novelty in this theology is not that it abandons orthodox dogma. Rather it is a matter of epistemology - dogma is affirmed but on a different basis and crucially, therefore, in a different way. To affirm dogma in this way is quite different from the situation under orthodoxy; its significance and function have changed.[110] Theology, obedient to the absolutism that has taken the lead in the treatment of theology's subject-matter, accepts its lesser role.

As far as Barth is concerned, then, the most significant development in the theology of the century is neither neology nor Wolffianism but the much earlier work of Johannes Franz Buddeus. Buddeus is the first theologian Barth discusses (other than V.E. Löscher who is mentioned as the last notable representative of Lutheran orthodoxy). He is open to pietism, emphasizing the *praxis pietatis* constantly. The significant thing, for Barth, is that for him "the Christian truth as a whole and in its individual details is necessary to faith not as a revealed truth, but as one which leads to our salvation".[111] The reality of salvation in the human being becomes the criterion for assessing the value of revealed truth. Human reason is capable

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106 Barth, *PT*, 150.

107 Ibid. 150. It is worth noting, perhaps, that in his first series of dogmatics lectures, in 1924, Barth emphasized strongly that dogma and dogmatics "are not human opinion". See Barth, *GD*, 17.

108 Barth, *PT*, 147.

109 Ibid. 161.

110 It is tempting to make the comparison with MacIntyre's description of the modern predicament as one in which moral discourse remains unchanged on the surface, while in reality it has become deeply problematic.

111 Barth, *PT*, 142.

of distinguishing between true and false revelation. Barth finds in this a fundamental and revolutionary shift in theological epistemology. It does not bear its full fruit in Buddeus himself, who had a rather conservative disposition; he had, however, opened up a road which "ascribed to reason the significance of a material criterion for revelation".[112] Many positions that Buddeus himself did not attack had later to be given up "because they could no longer be held after what Buddeus and his colleagues had conceded and surrendered".[113] Barth takes care to stress that this was no genuine innovation on Buddeus' part either - it was of course only his appropriation of the new approach to the subject-matter of theology. The issue which Barth is most concerned with in all the theologians of the century is identified here: the relationship between reason and revelation. The loss (or rejection) of the belief that the human *telos* is given by a particular act of divine grace enters theology in the transformation of the understanding of revelation, such that human reason acts as a criterion by which revelation can be measured, assessed, judged and, ultimately, rejected.[114]

vii. Barth and MacIntyre: relations between the two narratives

Given this clearer picture of the structure and detail of Barth's narrative, what can now be said about its relation to MacIntyre's history of moral theory? I suggested earlier that while the two are concerned with different subject-matter, they have a great deal in common, arising from a common identification of the loss of teleological forms of moral and theological reason as a critical turning point in history. Reflection on MacIntyre's analysis suggested the possibility of a narrative which paralleled his, but which presupposed something like a restored faith in divine grace, rather than a restored form of Aristotelian reason.[115] What would such a narrative look like? I would suggest that it would concentrate on the effects of the loss of the notion of grace which had been understood to direct us towards the

112 Barth, *PT*, 163.

113 Ibid. 164.

114 Note that Barth made use of this analysis later in the *Church Dogmatics*. See *CD* I/2, 288-90. His comments in both places have been queried by Stephen Williams. See his essay 'Barth, Buddeus and the Eighteenth Century' in *Modern Theology* 2 (1986), 309-318.

115 Jeffrey Stout has made a similar point about the possibilities MacIntyre's narrative might allow. See 'Virtue among the Ruins: An Essay on MacIntyre' in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 26 (1984), 266.

telos of human life. This means it would focus on theological subject matter rather than on moral theory; it would discuss the loss of a 'higher authority' in human affairs, and the increased significance of human will in place of divine will. It would record the subsequent history of theological discourse and reasoning; since it would be seeking to describe the decreased relevance of divine will, it might consider changes in theological epistemology, to see whether that epistemology comes to reflect the *de facto* inaccessibility of divine will. It might in particular consider whether there were changes in the understanding of revelation, which had been so significant for the theological epistemology of the post-Reformation period.

In all these respects Barth's analysis so far does indeed constitute such an alternative narrative. The structure of the two analyses is very similar. For MacIntyre, Enlightenment moral theory has an impossible task, for it tries to proceed without an element essential to its success, namely an account of the *telos* of human life. For Barth, Enlightenment theology likewise has an impossible task. It too tries to proceed without something essential to its success, namely knowledge of the divine purpose for humanity, given in revelation. The result, on MacIntyre's account, is a situation in which moral discourse has the appearance of an appeal to objective criteria, but in fact only expresses the individual will. On Barth's account, the result is a theology which has the appearance of a discourse which serves and guides the Church, but in fact only has the force of individual opinion. Each of these discourses begs a similar question: why should the expression of an individual will be a guide for conduct? And why should discourse with the status of individual opinion be a guide for the Church?

As for epistemology, Barth highlights changes in the theological understanding of revelation right at the start of the eighteenth century. The relation between revelation and reason is substantially altered, such that any claim regarding revelation must be tested by reason. It is noteworthy that MacIntyre's most detailed study of eighteenth century thought - his treatment of Scottish philosophy and culture - picks out this very same issue as central to the development the Enlightenment in that context. Commenting on the philosophical and theological currents of the time, he

> that we discover in the first part of the eighteenth century a sequence of heresy trials in which, although sometimes the orthodoxy of the accused in respect of some central Christian doctrine, such as that of the Trinity or of the intercessory work of Christ, is in question, the central issues are the relationship of rational enquiry in general, and more particularly of the enquiries of the moral philosopher to the Christian revelation within theological study.[116]

The background to these trials was a period of rivalry between distinct interpretations of Calvinist orthodoxy, which differed as to whether philosophical argument could be used in the service of theological truth. John Simson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, was tried in 1717 and 1727, and on the second occasion barred from teaching because of his views. His fundamental offence, MacIntyre notes, was his "avowed guiding maxim in theology that reason is its principle and foundation".[117] Yet within a short space of time views like Simson's could be aired without censure. MacIntyre mentions a sermon preached to the Synod of Dumfries in 1729 encouraging its hearers "to examine in the light of reason every claim to revelation, old or new."[118] Moreover other teachers - such as Archibald Campbell, Francis Hutcheson and William Leechman - who held similar views to Simson's and were tried between 1735 and 1744 did not have their teaching condemned. The period was one of transition. As MacIntyre notes: "it is difficult to resist the inference that it was not so much that Hutcheson was more orthodox than Simson as that the dominant conception of orthodoxy had somewhat changed."[119]

In short the observations made by Barth about the changes in theological epistemology in Germany in the early eighteenth century are paralleled remarkably closely by MacIntyre's observations about Scotland in the very same period. In both cases the critical change is in the understanding of revelation, and in particular the development of the notion that revelation must be tested and judged by reason. In both cases this occurs despite the maintenance of the appearance of orthodoxy.

116 *Which Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 245.
117 Ibid. 245.
118 Ibid. 247.
119 Ibid. 261.

In conclusion, what does the material surveyed in this chapter enable us to say about Barth's relationship to and attitude towards the Enlightenment? What matters most, perhaps, is that Barth analyses the Enlightenment in terms very similar to MacIntyre's. To that extent, the material considered tends to support the conclusions I drew at the end of the previous chapter. In the process it adds extra breadth and detail to the narrative. Does it entitle us, though, to say that Barth sees the Enlightenment as the source of the circumstances facing theology in his own time? I suggest that it would be wise to defer answering this question until the end of the next chapter, when the remainder of Barth's discussion of the background to modern theology has been considered.

i. Rousseau: first voice of the age of Goethe.

The remainder of the section on 'Background' consists of six chapters on individual writers. The extended treatment they receive contrasts sharply with the limited space devoted to each of the eighteenth century's theologians, and, indeed, to most of the nineteenth century theologians discussed later. Once again Barth's interest is in intellectual life quite generally: along with Kant and Hegel, he considers Rousseau, Lessing, Herder and Novalis, and, as already noted, had intended to conclude with a chapter on Goethe.[1]

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is first to be discussed, and is a pivotal figure in Barth's narrative, marking the emergence of a new spirit and, indeed, a new period. This new period - the age of Goethe - was notable for a reaction against the Enlightenment and its absolutism. However the new spirit, Barth argues, is not actually new at all: when properly understood it can be seen to be a development of the spirit of absolutism into a new form. Rousseau was the first, almost premature, voice of this age. Barth says of him that "he contradicted and rose above eighteenth-century man in no other way than that it was in Rousseau himself that eighteenth-century man achieved fulfilment".[2] His optimistic view of human nature and his educational theory, for example, seem to be expressions of the most exalted eighteenth century humanism. His writings embody pronounced individualism and rationalism. Yet with Rousseau all this has somehow changed in character, and entered the thought world that was to dominate the nineteenth century. As support for this contention Barth cites an article written by Rousseau for his *Dictionnaire de musique*, published in 1764, which deals with the nature of

1 Commentators on Barth's lectures have tended to pay most attention to the sections on Kant and Hegel. The interconnection of the various chapters as episodes in a unified argument has not always been appreciated. See for example Colin Gunton 'Towards a Theology after Christendom' in Thompson *Theology beyond Christendom*, 285-301. Gunton sees these lectures as evidence that Barth "was consciously adopting a programme" which attempted to transcend the Enlightenment. (p. 289.) But while he discusses Barth's treatment of Kant and Hegel, he doesn't mention his treatment of Rousseau, Lessing, Herder or Novalis.

2 Barth, *PT*, 174.

genius in music: "It conveys ideas in the form of feeling, feeling by means of accent. And in giving expression to passions it awakens them in the depths of the heart." Further, to the one who is incapable of apprehending this quality of genius, Rousseau declares: "if you feel no ecstasy or delight, if you find merely beautiful that which should move you to the depths of your being, how dare you ask the meaning of genius?"[3] This notion of genius is, Barth notes, not from the world of Bach, Haydn or even Mozart. It is "unmistakably Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn, line for line."[4]

What is Rousseau's true and lasting significance? It is not, says Barth, to be found in his contribution to the theological debates of his time, principally in the *Confession of Faith of a Vicar of Savoy*, from his novel *Emile*. While it is tempting for the theologian's gaze to linger here, it has to be recognized that Rousseau's life was not primarily a struggle against theological orthodoxy in the cause of rationalism. Nor was its primary achievement the political and educational theories he constructed in *Du contrat social* and *Emile* respectively. Nor was it located in the morality of his novel *la nouvelle Héloïse*. Such constructions, Barth argues, were still an expression of the spirit of the older age, though admittedly they were put forward with a resignation that was new - for they could only be second-best solutions for Rousseau. Barth then considers and rejects the idea that the centre lies in Rousseau's "lyricism of immediate feeling for himself and the world about him",[5] in the light of which his positive constructions can only have this second-best status. While this would obviously seem to point forward to idealism and romanticism, Barth does not see it as the critical first word of the new age. Rather, he looks to Rousseau's biography, his "pathological method of existing as such".[6] Here is found the fundamental discontinuity with the spirit of the eighteenth century: the various twists and turns of Rousseau's life were the result of his opposition to the bourgeois moral life of the period. Even his delusions of persecution in the later part of his life

[3] Barth, *PT*, 177. Barth did give references when quoting Rousseau, but unfortunately he did not specify which editions of the texts he was using. The same is true of each of the authors considered in this chapter.

[4] Ibid. 178. Barth notes that such ideas can also be found in Schleiermacher's *Reden*, which of course date from more than 30 years later.

[5] Ibid. 214.

[6] Ibid. 214.

are accorded this significance. In fact they express the break with the eighteenth century more fully than any other part of Rousseau's life; these delusions may have been a madness but, says Barth, "we cannot help admitting that in its own way it was at least a pertinent madness".[7]

What is significant in Rousseau's life is its broken quality; and in this it represents the breaking down of the absolutist will for form. It is not that Rousseau rejects the absolutism - rather he cannot accept its expression in the will to impose form. A society ruled by this will is a hell rather than a paradise. It is not a sphere where life can be lived in accordance with true human nature. In a revealing passage, Barth suggests that Rousseau could not compromise with this world:

> His only possible course was radically to deny the spiritual and intellectual, the moral and social forms which, unshaken by the Lisbon earthquake, held sway in Europe from 1750 to 1760. From the world in which Voltaire was a great man Rousseau, shaken to the depths of his being, could only withdraw, depart into the wilderness, into madness, put on fanciful Armenian clothing, marry Thérèse Le Vasseur, copy scores and go plant-gathering. Anyone who was a friend of this world could be no friend of his, even if his name was David Hume, and were he ever so well-disposed, or what passes for well-disposed, towards him. Let all his contemporaries reject him—indeed they must reject him, it cannot be otherwise. The time would come when he would be understood—in his last years Rousseau continually consoled himself with this, his prophecy.[8]

Rousseau's resignation to this world, on the basis of which his great constructive works were written, is based on a more fundamental non-resignation. He retains the notion of man in a state of nature, and in fact speaks of man in society only on this basis. This, says Barth, is what gives Rousseau's work its peculiar impetus.[9] With this impetus the absolutism of the eighteenth century is broken - but not destroyed. It is broken but it is also fulfilled, such that it enters the new age in a new form, an anthropological form. The eighteenth century, Barth comments, had not extended the scope of its absolutism to include humanity itself. The distinguishing feature of the age of Goethe, though, is that it takes this step: "man's command was now regarded as much wider, as including man's

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[7] Barth, *PT*, 219.
[8] Ibid. 218.
[9] Ibid. 220.

command over himself".[10] The spirit of the old age is reborn in the new "like the phoenix from the ashes"! The new age has an optimism and a Pelagianism which are also developments of the typical eighteenth century view - but they are "incomparably more powerful" than those of the older age.[11] Such optimism is not a product of simple *naïveté*, Barth argues, but derives its power from its new basis - human existence as such. Barth says of Rousseau that:

> A whole world revealed itself to him when he gazed into himself. He did not do this in the manner of the individualism of his time, which looked within in order to go out again at once into the outside world, desiring to apprehend, form and conquer. Rousseau intended to linger there because he had recognized that in it he possessed his own unique world full of unique forms of truth and beauty.[12]

Human existence as such becomes the important criterion of truth and value, and the "dependable norm for all the distinctions and choices that are necessary in life".[13] The absolutism of the new age therefore involves belief not just in the infinite capacity of human powers, but also in the infinite value of human existence. Humanity in the state of nature is really just the human *itself*, as opposed to the human in its social relations or in its works. Rousseau discovered a new world which is not so much located *in* himself - it just *is* himself.

The thing he discovered can be described as that most important element of the age of Goethe - feeling. Barth quotes Rousseau's *Rêveries* to good effect: "The feeling of existing stripped of all other emotions is in itself a precious feeling of peace and security, which would alone be quite enough to make one's existence sweet and dear."[14] The standard view, Barth notes, would be to say that Rousseau and the age which he prefigured discovered feeling as something which was beyond knowledge and action, in that it was their source, and was therefore understood to be the fundamental capacity of the

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[10] Barth, *PT*, 225.
[11] Ibid. 226.
[12] Ibid. 226.
[13] Ibid. 226.
[14] Ibid. 227. Note that in the English translation the beginning and end of the quotation from which this comes are not marked. They are, however, correctly indicated in the German edition.

human mind. Barth is concerned, though, to emphasize that feeling is not to be understood solipsistically: he talks of there being a dialectical relationship with the object. In feeling one is in contact with an existence different from one's own; one is neither dominated by the object nor master of it. In feeling one respects and does not interfere with the object as such, but one equally respects oneself, experienced in that same feeling. Barth draws attention, significantly, to the quality of freedom implied by this understanding of feeling:

> With feeling—and it is this which makes for the intoxicating grandeur of the human capacity which has been discovered here, and for the mature wisdom of him who is aware of it—it is always a question of the superior freedom inherent in being able to make contact with objects and yet being able to part from them again, to be separate from them and yet able to make contact with them again and again.[15]

This "superior freedom" is significant, for it sounds almost like divine freedom. The thought clearly crossed Barth's mind too: he recalls again a remark of Rousseau's which he had quoted a couple of pages earlier: in feeling one is "*impassible comme Dieu même*". In this state one is "for the first time invested with a true power in the world of things".[16] This remark illustrates Barth's conviction that the new age consists not only in the breaking of the absolutism of the century, but of its rehabilitation in a more powerful form: the century which believed in the omnipotence of human powers is now offered the means to possess a new power in the world. This quasi-divine freedom possessed in feeling includes the freedom to be aware of the identity between self and object, and the freedom to be aware of their non-identity. This freedom can, Barth suggests, be described as that of human "spirit-nature". He draws attention once again to the way in which Rousseau anticipated Goethe, for Rousseau's "nature" is the spirit-nature of the age of Goethe.[17]

This is a point of great significance, for Barth, in that it impinges on the theological problematic at the critical point - the relation of reason and

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[15] Barth, *PT*, 230.

[16] Ibid. 230.

[17] See ibid. 231. Barth also notes that there "is already something of the great peace imparted by this Goethean concept in Rousseau's confusion". Barth later laid great emphasis on the importance of peace for Schleiermacher.

revelation. Rousseau leaves behind the notion of original sin and the notion of revelation, understood as "an event which was something apart from the inherent development of humanity";[18] it is not so much that he joins in the criticism to which these had been subject, as that he leaves them behind altogether. He can do so because with the discovery of feeling, everything becomes a relative movement within human reality. Sin and grace, reason and revelation - such oppositions are resolved in the dialectic of spirit-nature. The conflict between reason and revelation is solved, Barth notes, in that "man was encouraged to look upon himself alternately now as reason and now as revelation".[19] What has taken place in Rousseau's discovery of human spirit-nature is in fact a tremendous widening in the concept of reason. Within this widened understanding of reason the theological problem can be accommodated and treated; from this time is it possible to have a consistent theological rationalism, in which "the Christian Spirit is identical with the truly humane spirit, as it is inalienably and tangibly present to us in that depth of the *ratio* in that inmost anthropological province".[20]

What are the important points in this discussion of Rousseau for the direction of Barth's narrative? First of all, I think it is interesting that Barth sees a widening of the concept of reason in this relativization and reformulation of the oppositions of sin and grace, reason and revelation within human spirit-nature. It is perhaps worth recalling MacIntyre's argument in *After Virtue*. The Enlightenment project is, he argues, the consequence of a narrowing of the conception of reason that had prevailed in the middle ages. The futility of that project arises from the impossibility of giving a satisfactory account of morality on the basis of the modern, impoverished, calculative understanding of reason. It is significant, then, that Barth lays such emphasis on the fact that Rousseau's notion of nature involves a widening of the concept of reason, one which embraces and incorporates the distinctions between sin and grace, and reason and revelation. In his earlier analysis, Barth had stressed how the absolutism of the eighteenth century sought to deny original sin. In this, its so-called

[18] Barth, *PT*, 232.
[19] Ibid. 232.
[20] Ibid. 233.

Pelagianism, and in its insistence that revelation must be brought before the tribunal of human reason, it denied itself any access to the notion of true uncorrupted human nature, in distinction from present human reality. It denied itself, in other words, the very things that would allow a teleological element in its anthropology or its moral discourse. Now, Barth describes Rousseau's anthropology as two-dimensional, in distinction from the typical eighteenth century view "whose way of thinking was one-dimensional".[21] He seems to mean by this that the widening of the concept of reason consisted in the restoration, in some form, of the teleological capacity of human reason. The second dimension, missing in the eighteenth century's thought, is the dimension which reaches out to something beyond human desires and will.

Yet Barth has to qualify the view that Rousseau reintroduces a second teleological dimension in his anthropology; this dimension is always relative and bounded. It is not really the distinction between good and evil, and the comparison with the doctrines of original sin and the fall is inappropriate: even in the state of corruption "the corruption of this state is only relative corruption".[22] The second dimension is only present in a relative way because, fundamentally, the true human nature it apprehends is apprehended as a human possibility. Neither Rousseau nor the whole age that followed him were able to "get beyond the distinction between man in his heart of hearts and his actual inner life, between human possibility and actuality".[23] The new and broadened concept of reason is broader only to this extent: that within it human possibility can be known as well as human actuality. With this concept of reason in place the age of Goethe may proceed.

ii. Lessing

Barth presents Gotthold Ephraim Lessing as a figure who, like Rousseau, belonged to the eighteenth century but at the same time rose above it. The two, moreover, had in common the discovery of the "second dimension",

[21] Barth, *PT*, 221.
[22] Ibid. 223.
[23] Ibid. 224-5.

the discovery of "human existence as such". For Lessing, as for Rousseau, "the ultimate reality is this free, stirring communion of the ego with the object, in which, however, the ego ever retains and regains the mastery".[24] Lessing's main achievement was in drama and dramatic theory - significantly, he viewed drama as that in which, to use Barth's words "what is actually presented is the inner life of these characters, the sight of which must evoke in the spectator feelings of sympathy and of compassion".[25] His dramas were felt to contain something new; Barth suggests this new factor was to be found in their real object - human life as such.

Barth uses this study of Lessing to pick up and expand on themes which he had identified while discussing Rousseau. In Lessing, it is particularly the treatment of the theme of revelation that is of interest. Barth notes that the Reimarus fragments published by Lessing mounted an unprecedented assault on Christian revelation, attacking its very possibility. They contained a sharp contrast between the human possibility of natural religion and any allegedly revealed historical religion; they attempted a reduction of the latter to the former, in a similar manner to the theology of the Rousseau's Vicar of Savoy. Lessing's concern is not simply to effect this reduction, though. He is conscious not only of this critique of revelation, but also of the poverty of what is offered in its place. Revelation, as far as Lessing is concerned, is not yet finished with. He had a "positive interest in revelation", even though "the nature of that interest was relative".[26] He did not believe that a critique of revelation such as that of Reimarus could succeed. His interest in that critique, Barth suggests, was rather that it provided a kind of litmus test for the Church and theology. Lessing was concerned with their response to this test, and was willing to advise them as to the character of their response. The Reimarus fragments contained a historian's attack on revelation as a historical reality and possibility. Lessing's concern was that the theology of the time attempted to reply to this attack with a historical defence. This he regarded as a serious mistake: "When will they cease to want to hang nothing less than the whole of

[24] Barth, *PT*, 236.
[25] Ibid. 237.
[26] Ibid. 247-8.

eternity on a spider's thread!"[27] It was pointless, he argued, to reply to historical attacks on revelation with historical 'proofs'. No historical matter can be demonstrated, however strong the evidence. And if "no historical truth can be demonstrated, then neither can it in turn be used to demonstrate anything".[28]

Barth goes on to suggest, though, that this criticism of the historical defence of revelation is only in fact a secondary matter for Lessing. More important is Lessing's positive recommendation as to the defence which ought to be mounted - for it is the notions of feeling, experience and the heart that provide the way to a true defence. Barth notes Lessing's famous dictum: "Accidental historical truths can never become proofs for necessary truths of reason."[29] It is not the historical character that disqualifies here - rather the accidental character; historical truths can indeed play their part in the proof of "necessary truths of reason" - by way of the heart:

> it is as something which reaches and touches us directly, as something which immediately enlightens and enters into us, that historical truth becomes revelation and proves that it has the force of the necessary truth of reason.[30]

Lessing talks of the necessity of inner truth, in terms of which written tradition must be explicable.

What, though, is meant by revealed religion in this context? It cannot, Barth argues, be any encounter with God as that was understood by Protestantism prior to the eighteenth century. It cannot be any notion of revelation as

> historical truth which descends from above, a particular truth stepping in from outside in distinction from all other historical truth; a truth which is indeed, uniquely qualified. For that is the character which the Protestant doctrine of Scripture concretely ascribes to revelation.[31]

It cannot be such because Lessing's polemics in the dispute about the

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[27] Quoted Barth, *PT*, 250.
[28] Quoted ibid. 251.
[29] Quoted ibid. 253.
[30] Ibid. 261.
[31] Ibid. 262.

Reimarus fragments are against precisely such a possibility. For Lessing, revelation is not an encounter with a God who breaks into history but a matter of realities immanent within history - inner truth, the history of religions, the production of virtue. He speaks

> in unison with Roman Catholicism and the whole of Protestant modernism ... in favour of history itself as distinct from and as against the Lord of history, who is indelibly denoted precisely by the Protestant doctrine of the Scriptures.[32]

In short, Lessing's view is that *"History is revelation"*.[33] This revelation can be seen as the continuing education of humanity, giving more quickly what reason is in principle capable of discovering on its own.

In so far as there is a second, teleological dimension in Lessing's thought, then, it is once again bounded within the horizons of human possibility; this is shown even by the fact that in the fable of the rings the proof of true religion will be a moral virtue which can be specified in advance. Yet this teleology, for all its limits, is genuine; and it is this which distinguishes Lessing from more typical neologians. His significance for Barth is that he spoke "the old word 'revelation' with a new solemnity as a description of this course".[34]

The discussion of Lessing, then, repeats and reinforces points made in the section on Rousseau. The fundamental issue Barth highlights in these chapters is that the new line of thought which emerges with these men, a line of thought apparently opposed to the thought and culture of the earlier eighteenth century, and explicitly critical of it, is in fact a development of that earlier thought, and perhaps even its fulfilment. Again the key here is absolutism, once more being used to unite apparently opposed tendencies. The significance of this is, of course, that the prior analysis of absolutism becomes relevant not only to the Eighteenth century, but to nineteenth century ideas and life also. The 'expanded inner room' of reason appears, on Barth's account, as an attempt to restore the capacity to grasp a truth not

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[32] Barth, *PT*, 262-3.
[33] Ibid. 263.
[34] Ibid. 264.

grounded in human actuality. Yet the most radical distinction it can recognize is in this regard is the distinction between what is actual and what is humanly possible. Instead of restoring a 'higher authority', it therefore amounts to a further adulation of human nature, a further intensification of absolutism. Barth summed this up well during the discussion of Rousseau:

> The tension which is peculiar to Rousseau's teaching, in virtue of his distinction between two dimensions, consists only however of the difference, native to man himself, between the possibility and its particular realization at any time, between man as he is in his heart of hearts and his actual inner life, between what is truly human and man as he is in practice. It was this distinction which Rousseau discovered, and with it the great problem of critical idealism as it was later seen and developed by Kant ... But since his teaching recognizes this distinction only in man himself, since man's capacity for doing good is not affected by it, the end effect of his teaching ... is none the less like an augmented and heightened triumph of man, or triumph of man's capacities, which to this extent makes it a solemn repetition and confirmation of the great eighteenth-century thesis.[35]

iii. Kant

Immanuel Kant does not, Barth recognizes, stand in quite the same line of development as these others. He did not contribute to the broadening of the eighteenth century's understanding of reason; he sought instead to criticize reason. His criticism is not a form of scepticism, though, but an attempt to understand human understanding, and thereby to make it all the more secure. To that extent, however, he also contributed to the fundamental tendency of the period, to the transformation of absolutism into a new and more powerful form.

Much of Barth's discussion of Kant is devoted to a description of Kant's philosophy of religion, and its basis in his critical philosophy. The point of this material is to show that there is in Kant's philosophy no room for any religious reality which has its foundation elsewhere than in reason. Specifically, Barth suggests that the primary aim of Kant's philosophy of religion is to establish that religious and theological knowledge is a matter in which reason is involved, and therefore that it is based on human practice, indeed on the moral act understood as the action of the good will. Kant's secondary intention is to assess and describe religion in so far as it

[35] Barth, *PT*, 223.

has this character. The philosophy of religion, for Kant, treats of the religion of reason alone, which is the "inner, smaller circle" within revealed religion - Barth suggests that Kant sees the relationship as that of the kernel to the shell.[36]

The religion of reason consists essentially in morality, appearing "in its majesty". Morality itself contains this movement toward religion, since belief in the idea of God is presupposed by the act in accordance with a good will. The position of religion which claims the authority of a revelation is decisively conditioned by this: Barth notes that on this basis any God proclaimed or revealed must be measured "against an ideal conception of God... in order to recognize the former as God. He must therefore have already perceived God directly and in himself before any act of revelation has taken place."[37] But revelation cannot be a matter of empirical knowledge - there cannot be any criteria which could correctly distinguish it from other empirical knowledge. In treating of the religion of reason, Kant cannot accommodate any claim to revelation - it must be a religion of reason *alone*. The best that can be said of claims to revelation in religion is that due to human weakness, positive religion is generally necessary as the 'vehicle' for true religion. It is possible that rational and revealed religion may coincide, and Kant thinks that this coincidence occurs in the case of Christianity.

There is, though, a second strand in Kant's philosophy of religion, which connects to the foregoing precisely at this critical point, the boundary of the religion of reason alone. The second strand is evident in Kant's discussion of the idea of a principle of evil: Kant accepts the existence of radical evil, evil which is present within the realm of human reason and which cannot be purged by human effort. Its source is in the freedom of the will to choose whether or not to will in accordance with duty: "in the same incomprehensible freedom of reason in which the good, lawful will can be made actual, its great opposite, a will for evil, can be made manifest too".[38] Kant talks of weakness of will, self-interest, and even malevolence as involved in this, and he even describes this evil as original sin. His

[36] Barth, *PT*, 280.
[37] Ibid. 282.
[38] Ibid. 294.

acceptance of such a notion is out of step not only with the eighteenth century but, apparently, with the principles of his thought as already discussed. Barth notes that the notion of radical evil seems to disturb the completed and contained quality of rational religion as already described. It leads Kant to consider notions such as justification and atonement, which, as Barth says, derive from a different centre than that of Kant's rational religion. Yet for all this Kant does not come near to the reformers' doctrine of justification. Barth notes how Kant, when considering the problem of the distance between human incapacity and moral duty, insists in keeping his distance from the question of the part God might play in bridging this gap. A revelation of, for example, divine forgiveness, is in principle impossible. The admission of the possibility of an absolute divine decree would be the death of reason, as Kant understands it. Grace can only be a *parergon* of rational religion; in so far as Kant discusses grace, he either tends to equate it with human nature, or to stress the need to do as much as one can towards self-improvement, on the understanding that grace will, in some unspecified manner, provide what is lacking. Barth describes this as "the twofold possibility of the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation".[39]

Barth makes much of the fact that Kant's philosophy of religion has this dual character: shaped, as the religion of reason alone, by the central elements of his critique of reason; and yet at the same time aware of something beyond these limits, even if that something is only hinted at. Even at the beginning of his discussion of Kant, Barth had identified this as the most important point, suggesting that Kant, uniquely in his time, recognized the possibility of a different theology, even if he rejected it. With this recognition he "points beyond the relative distinction between the old and the new time which concerns us here. And he points beyond what is common to them both."[40]

Given this characterization of Kant's philosophy of religion, Barth suggests that there are three possible ways for theology to respond to it. He outlines these, giving examples of how these different possibilities were taken up in the theology of the nineteenth century. The first possibility is to accept the main lines of Kant's philosophy and programme, and to adopt these as the

[39] Barth, *PT*, 303.

[40] Ibid. 267.

premises for a theology. This is the route of rationalistic theology such as is represented by Wegscheider, and taken up again by Ritschl and his followers. Secondly, it was possible to accept the Kantian scheme, but with the significant reservation that his conception of reason requires to be broadened by the recognition of feeling alongside the theoretical and practical capacities of reason. This was the line taken by Schleiermacher and others - the main line of nineteenth century theology in fact. Thirdly it was possible to reject Kant's conception of the philosophy of religion more radically - a line which would have involved a more fundamental break with the theology of the Enlightenment than either of the earlier possibilities. Yet this possibility was not really taken up seriously by the theology of the nineteenth century, Barth suggests. It would have involved theology daring to take its stance upon its own basis, revelation specifically, rather than upon reason; this would have been for theology to enter into "a dialogue with philosophy, and not, wrapping itself up in the mantle of philosophy, a quasi-philosophical monologue".[41]

The final step Barth takes in assessing Kant's philosophy of religion is to consider what basis there is in Kant's own writings for a theology taking up this third possibility. He suggests that there are occasions when Kant takes half a step over the boundary of purely rational religion: he designates what can exist there as biblical theology, and denies that his philosophy of religion disputes the validity of any claim to revelation. What he does dispute is, in Barth's words:

> the idea that the reality and possibility of revelation, its availability as data for human reason and its perception by human reason, are things which can be accounted for by philosophical means, the idea that over and beyond the philosophy of religion there is a philosophy of revelation and of faith, and that by it theology might be represented, or make its position secure.[42]

Theology is to be understood in its distinction and separation from philosophy and from purely rational religion. Barth quotes Kant to the effect that theology must not "in what concerns the fulfilment of the divine commandments in our will ... by any means count upon nature, upon man's

41 Barth, *PT*, 307.
42 Ibid. 309-10.

own moral capacity (virtue), that is".[43] Further, Kant sees the proper task of the 'biblical theologian' as to be "the scribe of the Church faith, which rests upon statutes; laws, that is to say, which stem from the arbitrary choice of another authority".[44] What Kant does, in other words, is to make suggestions about the character of a religion which, while, potentially consistent in its content with the religion of reason alone, exists entirely beyond the boundary of that religion. It must seek no rational defence of its faith that God has spoke in the Bible; it must seek no basis in or support from reason or philosophy. It depends on grace, on revelation which can only amount, from Kant's point of view, to 'arbitrary choice'. Barth finds this possibility summed up by Kant's comment that "The biblical theologian proves that God exists by means of the fact that he has spoken in the Bible."[45]

Kant could not have made these comments, Barth notes, without an element of irony, perhaps even in partial mockery of the position of the 'biblical theologian'. Yet they have great significance for the theologian. Nonetheless it is difficult not to feel that Barth's interest in this third possibility is rather odd. Certainly there would appear to be connections between it and his own understanding of theology. But for Barth to devote a significant portion of his discussion to this possibility, and particularly to a search for anticipations of it in Kant's own writings, risks undermining the account he has already given of Kantian philosophy of religion. Barth's procedure requires an explanation, which he makes the reader wait some time for, and to which I will return in due course.

iv. Herder

With Barth's essay on Herder we return to the line of development which began with Rousseau and Lessing. Barth identifies Herder as the figure who, though aware of Kant's critical philosophy, attempts to pass round about it and reinstate feeling and experience as capacities within human reason alongside its theoretical and practical capacities - indeed to relativize these

[43] Quoted Barth, *PT*, 310.
[44] Quoted ibid. 310.
[45] Quoted ibid. 311 and, italicized, at 312.

latter capacities and install feeling as the fundamental form of reason. Such a movement, of course, had to ignore the fact that Kant had no place for any faculty of feeling, stating bluntly that it "cannot possibly form the basis for any knowledge at all".[46]

Barth calls Herder a "despiser of the syllogism".[47] The most significant idea in his thought, Barth suggests, is quite simply humanity; and to be human is to be so much more than a mind of pure reason: "Just as our way of knowing is only human, and must be so if it is to be right, so our will can only be human too; something which arises from and is full of human feeling. It is humanity which is the noble standard by which we know and act."[48] This interest in humanity is expressed in a concern with history. Herder not only has an interest in particular historical periods, he takes the eighteenth century to task for its lack of a historical sense, and attempts to write a philosophy of history - a very unusual notion at the time. History matters to Herder because it is the expression of the human spirit in particular circumstances. History, moreover, is tradition: we are historical beings and, therefore, in the exercise of our will and understanding we are not autonomous but related to a history. In this, as in much of his thought, "Herder shouted what Lessing had whispered".[49]

Though not primarily a theologian, Herder was quite willing to speak of theological subject matter. In his thought, God is to be found in living experience. But living experience is both self-experience and the experience of the self as historical, in a tradition. Herder then can equate the voice of God with "the tradition... which shapes the future".[50] Religion is spoken of by Herder as the highest form of humanity. To understand this, though, one has to remember the full significance of the notion of humanity for Herder - for him to say this is not to limit religion but to exalt it. In distinction from Kant, Herder finds it easy to speak of revelation: humanity, not least in its religious aspect, is historical, and historical tradition is the very means by which God speaks to us. "Standing within history", Barth comments, "also

[46] Barth, *PT*, 315.
[47] Ibid. 324.
[48] Quoted ibid. 324.
[49] Ibid. 327.
[50] Ibid. 328.

means on principle standing in the stream of revelation."[51] As for the relationship between revelation and reason, Herder likens the former to a mother and the latter to her daughter: "The mother cannot be against the daughter, and the daughter, if she is the right sort, should have no wish to be against the mother."[52] Rightly understood, there can be no conflict between reason and revelation. Barth's view of all this is clear, despite his desire to describe and not to judge: Herder turns theology into, in his own words "the most beautiful, significant and true philosophy".[53] As such, says Barth, any claim theology might make for itself can only be "one very debatable assertion among others. On such a footing theology will not be able on principle to reject and deplore criticism from a philosophy which has itself become critical."[54]

v. Novalis

Barth moves on to Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), chosen as a representative of Romanticism. This is necessary, he believes, since the "decisive main stream of nineteenth-century theology cannot ... be explained in terms of Herder alone".[55] There was an explicit Romanticism in the early work of Schleiermacher, which is reflected in the theology of the century even as far as Herrmann and Troeltsch. Barth suggests, in fact, that in studying Romanticism "we may be concerned here with the very heart of nineteenth-century theology".[56] Romanticism, he suggests, is the deeper source of the theology which followed Herder methodologically. Where Herder offered a correlation, Romanticism offered a synthesis. Novalis' Romanticism was particularly pure, a consequence perhaps of the fact that he died so young. His Romanticism was the expression of yearning, and "Romanticism is pure as yearning, and only as yearning."[57]

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[51] Barth, *PT*, 330.

[52] Quoted ibid. 332.

[53] Quoted ibid. 338.

[54] Ibid. 338. Cf. Charles Taylor *Hegel* pp. 3-29 for a related account of this period, but which attributes greater significance to Herder.

[55] Barth, *PT*, 343.

[56] Ibid. 348.

[57] Ibid. 347. Novalis died of consumption in 1801, at the age of 29. It is worth recalling that in his lecture at Schulpforta in July 1922 Barth depicted his theology as a sigh. It may not be unfair to suggest that he would, by 1929, have regarded that as a lingering element of Romanticism.

Barth focuses on the concept of 'poesy', used by Novalis as the basis of a synthesis between the problematic antitheses which hovered on the border between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Barth lists these as philosophy and art, nature and history, love and religion, and, ultimately, Mary and Christ. The first three of these antitheses are properly seen as "antithetic unities", Barth says, for they have "an exact and therefore neutral and therefore superior centre".[58] Moreover, the centre of these three antitheses coincide - the antitheses should be seen as diameters of a circle, necessarily sharing the same centre.[59] The last antithesis, between Mary and Christ, is one which Barth is not prepared initially to assimilate to the others. Instead he raises the question of whether it can be understood as an antithetic unity, or whether it must rather be seen "as a disjunctive antithesis, as an either—or".[60]

The centre of all antithetic unities is poesy - this is related to the original meaning of ποιησις - creative work. Barth quotes Novalis' claim that "The poetic philosopher is *en état de créateur absolu.*"[61] The poetic is not to be identified only as art, though. In dealing with poesy we are dealing with creative work in the broadest sense. The concept of poesy is the concept of the self, or of life. Barth notes that Novalis sometimes spoke in a Fichtean manner of the ego confronting the non-ego but such that neither can be posited without the other. At other times, though, Barth observes, Novalis

> defined this centre better and more peculiarly as the life which consists precisely in its defiance of the attempt to comprehend it, because it has its being beyond the ego and non-ego, being and non-being, composed of synthesis, thesis and antithesis and yet nothing of all three.[62]

In this neutral centre, the division between art and thought, poet and philosopher, is overcome. Consideration of either poetry or philosophy

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[58] Barth, *PT*, 349.

[59] Note that later, in his chapter on Schleiermacher, Barth likens the latter's thought to an ellipse with two centres, but questions whether the two can resist the tendency to collapse into one.

[60] Ibid. 349.

[61] Quoted ibid. 350. Such a phrase is indicative of the relationship between Romanticism and Expressionism.

[62] Ibid. 350.

involves the movement from one to the other. Likewise, nature is not properly understood without an appreciation of its "necessary counter-pole", history.[63] In nature and history we have to do with seeking and finding the familiar in the strange, the ego in the non-ego. In neither is there an outward movement without also a referring back to the neutral centre. In love and religion, it is even harder, Barth says, to distinguish either from the other or from the unifying, creative centre. In love, the non-ego is understood as Thou rather than as It.

As for the antithesis between Mary and Christ, Barth engages in an extended discussion of the possibility that Novalis' religious teaching contains an element which calls into question the entire romantic scheme. He considers Novalis' remark that "God is sometimes $1 \times \infty$, sometimes $1/\infty$, sometimes 0."[64] The last part of this, the '0' is what interests Barth - the rest is easily enough seen as the dialectic of Romanticism. Barth considers the idea that this '0' represents death, the boundary beyond which the Romantic synthesis could not extend. The question of whether Novalis takes Christ seriously is, for Barth, the question of whether he takes the boundary seriously, including the idea that there can be something beyond this boundary. The antithesis between Christ and Mary is the antithesis between on the one hand this possibility, and on the other hand the possibility that for Novalis there can be no serious recognition of this boundary, and therefore that there can be no advance beyond his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, in which communion with Christ is interpreted as communion with the non-ego in general. In this case death would not be a boundary but would be within the scope of the Romantic synthesis, and religion could only be for Novalis the religion of Mary rather than Christ.[65] For pure Romanticism, religious subject matter must be and must remain a matter of symbol. Whether or not Novalis' transcended his Romanticism at this point Barth does not in the end feel compelled to decide.

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[63] Barth, *PT*, 355.

[64] Quoted ibid. 363.

[65] See ibid. 381. Barth's choice of Mary to occupy one pole of this antithesis an example of his tendency to equate the thought of the nineteenth century with Roman Catholic thought. Here he suggests that Catholic Mariology is, like the religion of the Romantics, a religion of immanence: "In what concerns Mariology the Roman Catholic Church doctrine too... is still confined within the frame of the ancient and ever new religion of immanence, which one hundred years ago was called Romanticism."

vi. Hegel

The road which began with Rousseau ends, in a quite decisive way, with Hegel. Barth believes that Hegel represented, in an incomparable way, the whole period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries together, understanding the latter as the fulfilment of the former. The odd thing, in Barth's view, is not that Hegel saw his system as the final culmination of the history of philosophy; rather: "The astonishing thing is that nineteenth-century man did not acknowledge that his concern in the realm of thought, his basic intellectual concern, had truly achieved ultimate recognition in Hegel's philosophy."[66] Barth undertakes two tasks, therefore: first, to describe Hegel's thought, understood as the solution to the problems which had until that point only met with partial answers; second, to consider the reasons for the rejection of Hegel's solution.

"Hegel's philosophy is the philosophy of *self-confidence*."[67] This sentence is the beginning and the theme of Barth's exposition. He spells out some of its meaning straight away: this confidence is the self-confidence (*Selbstvertrauen*) of "thinking man", rooted in the act of thinking. In the act of thinking the thinker and the object of thought are completely present in one another, and therefore are identical. This identity is called *Geist*, and is one with God. Self-confidence, then, is also confidence in *Geist*, and confidence in God. It is confidence in the self, but not on the basis of individual enlightenment - it is confidence in human reason as such.

On the basis of this brief outline, Barth explains how Hegel is the fulfilment of the whole movement of thought that began with Rousseau.[68] There is first of all a strong affinity between Hegel and Novalis: in affirming the identity and equivalence of the ego and the non-ego, Hegel affirms the basic concern of Romanticism. He moves beyond Romanticism, though, because he found it "to be lacking in a firm and universally valid basis. It seemed to him that

66 Barth, *PT*, 384.
67 Ibid. 391.
68 Rousseau himself is not actually mentioned in this chapter, though. This is a consequence of the fact that this material dates from 1929, when the lectures began with Lessing. The argument is not substantially affected, though.

the truth and force of this synthesis was imperilled by the mere appeal to poetry, to creative experience, to the individual genius."[69] Secondly Hegel takes up in a similar way the concerns of Herder, in his inclusion of historical thought within his conception of reason. The broadening of the concept of reason noted first in Rousseau receives its definitive expression. Barth suggests in fact that the chief difference between Herder and Hegel is the latter's critique of Romanticism, which has already been noted. Thirdly, Hegel preserves the transcendentalism of Kant, but on a different basis. Hegel has no use whatsoever for a theory of knowledge; but the task Kant undertook in his critique of reason is an essential one - the correct self-understanding and self-establishment of reason. The Kantian distinctions within reason fall away, though, in the synthesis between ego and non-ego which Hegel takes from Romanticism.

Barth's view of the matter is that Hegel sought to secure the Enlightenment's confidence in the power of rational thought, a confidence which had been open to enlightened attack. What enables Hegel to secure it is his definitive broadening of the conception of human reason, such as to include all those things which seemed capable of calling that confidence into question. As such Hegel was able to fulfil the aims of both the Enlightenment and those who moved beyond it, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries together:

> the watchword 'Have the courage to use your own understanding' could only ring true when the idea of one's 'own understanding' was so deepened that the conflict with the object, the ignoring of history, and shutting one's eyes to the reality of destiny was superfluous, because all these things, the object, history and destiny, were included in it. God must not any longer be an offence or foolishness to one's 'own understanding'.[70]

While understanding is one's own, it is also "the one and only reason", the true human reason and, necessarily, the true reason of God. The idea of God standing opposed to human reason is disposed of, because it is relativized. Hegel made "the offence and foolishness of this opposition relative... by seeing that it could finally be resolved in the peace of reason, which is at

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[69] Barth, *PT*, 392.
[70] Ibid. 395.

once and as such the peace that is higher than all reason".[71] It is the inclusiveness of Hegelian reason, then, that gives the philosophy of self-confidence its basis and its power. Hegel is "the mighty and impressive voice of an entire era, the era of modern man".[72] Yet at the same time he takes care of the subject matter of theology better than all theologians, and not just in the modern period, "with the possible exception of Thomas Aquinas"![73]

Barth begins a new section of exposition by drawing attention to further characteristics of Hegelian reason - firstly it is absolute, and secondly it is to be understood as event; these two points are closely related. Absolute reason and *Geist* are free of all limitation or one-sidedness, and as such have absolute dignity, strength and value, qualities which cannot be limited or qualified by any contrast. Reason, though, only merits absolute confidence in so far as it is understood to be identical with the act of thinking. Barth states this forcefully:

> reason, truth, concept, idea, mind, God himself, are understood as an *event*, and, moreover, only as an event. They cease to be what they are as soon as the event, in which they are what they are, is thought of as interrupted, as soon as a state is thought of in its place. Essentially reason and all its synonyms are life, movement, process. God is God only in his divine action, revelation, creation, reconciliation, redemption; as an absolute act, as *actus purus*.[74]

This has important implications for understanding the character of Hegel's system: just as reason cannot be understood as static, so Hegel's system is no static construction. As regards actually reading Hegel, we are, Barth suggests, "only to look, and look again and again, and anyone who thinks he sees stable points and lines, quantities and relationships, is not in fact seeing what Hegel is seeking to show us".[75] Hegel's system is constituted and held together by a rhythm - the "rhythm of life itself, running through the fullness of history". It is, in fact, "the famous dialectical *method* of thesis,

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[71] Barth, *PT*, 395.
[72] Ibid. 397.
[73] Ibid. 396.
[74] Ibid. 398-9.
[75] Ibid. 399.

antithesis and synthesis".[76] The character of reason as event means that the centre of Hegel's system must be this method. No part of the system can be its organizing principle. Only the method can play this role, which is to say that "the centre moves with the thinker himself; it is always at the point where the self-movement of the mind in the consciousness of the thinking subject is taking place".[77]

The method of dialectic is Hegel's great achievement, but it is not the details of the method that matter so much as the fact that he has invented a truly universal method. With this, Barth's exposition has reached its destination: it is the universality of Hegel's method that enables him to fulfil the aspirations of his era so completely; and therefore it is the universality of his method that makes him an exemplar of the spirit of modernity. Hegel's method consisted in:

> the invention of a rule for thinking whereby one can arrive at the thought and its rule itself just as much as at the things in themselves as the object of thought, ... at the most primitive paths of the human psyche just as much as at the decisions of the Lord himself.[78]

Hegel's philosophy is enabled to be the philosophy of self-confidence because it has this method at its heart. Human thinking surely merits confidence, Barth says, if its principle is identical with this.

The thrust of Barth's exposition, then, is that Hegel provided an answer to problems which had, until that point, only met with partial solutions. Providing a philosophy of self-confidence was not only Hegel's aim - it had been the aim of the whole movement of thought from Rousseau onwards. A method which so broadened human reason as to include within it all possible sources of a challenge; a rule for thinking which could ground itself as well as the object of thought; in short a concept of reason which could once and for all make good the Enlightenment's belief in the "omnipotence of human powers" - this was not only Hegel's goal, but the goal towards which the whole line of thought had been directed. What distinguished Hegel, Barth suggests, was simply that he reached it.

[76] Barth, *PT*, 400.
[77] Ibid. 405.
[78] Ibid. 406.

To make such a claim, though, brings us to the second task Barth set himself - accounting for the subsequent and almost total rejection of Hegel. Why did failure follow so soon? Barth considers this question twice in the course of his discussion. The first occasion is prior to his exposition of Hegel's thought. Barth is adamant first of all that the age's turning away from Hegel can by no means be explained by weaknesses of his system in its details. Such weaknesses certainly exist, but do not at all justify the rejection of the whole, in the absence of any comparable or superior offer of universal method. Rather than the details, it must have been the nature of the project itself that came to be questioned. It must have been the case that

> the attempt to make a key to every lock must have come under suspicion, a deep resignation must have been born not only as far as the How of the Hegelian method was concerned, but also as regards its That, as regards the possibility of such a universal method at all.[79]

The rejection of Hegel must have resulted from a failure of confidence in the entire direction of the age's thought, and perhaps even a failure of the Enlightenment's confidence in human powers. Certainly from this moment on Barth observes that there was a loss of the sense of a unified culture. Knowledge diversified into its distinct disciplines. There was a great deal of talk of method but no method proved satisfactory. Relative to the line Barth has traced so far, "the intellectual development which has taken place since Hegel can only be regarded as a decline and a retrogression".[80]

The rejection of Hegel was therefore "the first sign that the new time was growing old, the first harbinger, perhaps we might say, of the catastrophe of 1914".[81] In rejecting Hegel, the nineteenth century rejected its own will and desire. In expressing that will so fully, Hegel had put on display its limitations, the hidden flaw in the age: "The rejection of Hegel might have been the fig-leaf with which man at this time sought to hide what he himself was aware of as his pudendum from his own sight, from the sight of others and from the sight of God."[82] The flaw Barth is thinking of is that in

[79] Barth, *PT*, 407-8.
[80] Ibid. 408.
[81] Ibid. 386.
[82] Ibid. 388-9.

working out its own particular concern, the age of Hegel neglected and denied concerns which it had a dim awareness of but which would have hindered the full expression of its particular spirit.

What does Barth mean by this talk of other concerns? He means the theological possibilities which he has sought an awareness of in each of the previous chapters. First was Kant: having described his philosophy of religion, Barth then asks how far Kant's own writings testify to an awareness of a completely different theological possibility, one with its point of departure in revelation. Such a procedure is puzzling. Having taken some care to describe Kant's philosophy of religion fairly, and to put it in the context of the critique of reason, why should Barth devote the final pages of his treatment to the thought that Kant might have been aware of a different possibility altogether? The same pattern of argument was used in the treatment of Herder. Barth suggested that Herder, like Kant, sometimes talked in ways which indicate a recognition of "the independence in faith which belief derives from its object, and only from its object".[83] But immediately he acknowledges that Herder never seems to have come to a genuine awareness of such a theological possibility. Why raise this issue, one might wonder, since it seems to relax the focus on the distinctive and important contribution of Herder to the period? The same question has to be asked of the chapter on Novalis. There, Barth introduced an antithesis involving Mary and Christ, to ask whether Novalis recognized a theological possibility with a basis outwith the Romantic synthesis. Yet the attention given to this last antithesis seems to weaken Barth's exposition, which had focussed on the antithetic unities in Novalis' thought.

The reason for this puzzling procedure only becomes apparent now that Hegel has been reached. Barth suggests that the entire age engaged in "the neglect, the overlooking, the covering up and denying of other concerns"[84] which limited and challenged its absolutism. Such possibilities were beyond the boundaries of the age's thought, excluded by the drive towards a self-confidence grounded in a universal method. Yet they seem at times to have been noticed, albeit without being taken seriously. Their neglect amounted

[83] Barth, *PT*, 338.
[84] Ibid. 389

to a "crime against the truth", and such crimes "must sooner or later be paid for". The price will inevitably be extracted from the "leaders and heroes, by those in whom the age itself was great".[85] Despite Hegel's philosophy of self-confidence; despite the care he took of theology, the price to be paid was his rejection.[86]

This, then, is Barth's initial argument about the rejection of Hegel. It has to be said it is problematic. Barth is suggesting that Hegel's rejection results from the entire age's failure to take into account certain theological possibilities. Hegel stood out from the age for the care he took of theology, better than the theologians in fact; yet if Barth's argument is correct it implies that he still did not take *enough* care of theology. I would suggest that Barth has an arguable case so far as the age in general and Romanticism in particular are concerned. But to include Hegel in this is questionable, when it is more usual to see his rejection as a consequence of his having been *too* theological. One could argue, in fact, that Hegel made the same criticism of Romanticism as Barth has made - that it neglected the question of truth. And if Hegel, as Barth admits, took much better care of this than the age in general, it seems paradoxical to suggest that he was rejected by the age for conforming to its failings.

However the argument described above was, as already mentioned, placed early in the chapter. One could be charitable to Barth and allow that it

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[85] Barth, *PT*, 389.

[86] It is worth recalling the difficulty which Marburg neo-Kantianism had in dealing with religion. Barth's perspective can perhaps be traced back to his days as a pupil of Herrmann, who rejected the neo-Kantian attempt to subsume religion under the categories of logic, ethics or aesthetics. It is worth recalling here also that Barth followed the same procedure in his discussion of the eighteenth century's attitude to religion. Specifically, he spent some time identifying points at which absolutism was unable to subdue theological questions entirely. (See ibid. 124-135.) The point of doing so was not perhaps entirely obvious at the time. In fact, however, it prepared for the subsequent material in two ways: first, it introduced the theme of the later chapters, that the attempt to treat theology and religion on the basis of absolutism was unable to succeed entirely; and second, precisely this failure in the eighteenth century created the need for a new and more powerful form of self-confidence. Regarding the resistance presented to absolutism by Christianity, Barth said: "Did not the man of the eighteenth century, the man who believed in the omnipotence of human capability, for whom there could be no subject matter of this kind in the last resort, find himself confronted here *in nuce* with the problem of the nature of his subject matter? Was not the attack which he had carried out so victoriously on all fronts against his subject-matter a failure if it was a failure here?" (ibid. 83-4.)

constitutes a criticism more of the line of thought already discussed than of Hegel himself; it sums up the position with regard to Hegel only in so far as he completes that line of thought. It does not, perhaps, do justice to him in so far as he transcended that line.

Barth returned to the question of the rejection of Hegel at the end of the chapter. His comments there are interesting, for he appears to offer a more balanced account. Barth began by putting the entire Enlightenment project in context:

> The Middle Ages had possessed a uniform culture, which even the Reformation had not destroyed. What did destroy it was the relentless progress of the intellectual movement of the Renaissance, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[87]

The Enlightenment contributed to an ever-widening gulf between Church and culture, a gulf which constituted a genuine threat to both. The quest for a basis for human self-confidence was a quest for a secure basis for culture, in its distinction from Christianity. But there could be no such assured human self-confidence or secure culture so long as religion was behind it "in the *rôle* of an insulted enemy". Schleiermacher's theology of peace, says Barth, anticipating himself, constituted an attempt at a truce between the two. This, though, could "not restore what had been lost since the Middle Ages, the unity of the human and the Divine".[88] (!) Only Hegel's speculative idealism was capable of bridging the gulf, and, Barth says, it did in fact do so. Hegel was able to be both a 'modern man' and a Christian.

Yet to do this he had to present demands to both sides, demands which required no compromise or concession but rather a truer self-understanding and a mutual recognition. Neither side could accept these demands:

> Modern man, without knowing of a better unity than that proposed by Hegel, yet split himself once again, as oil and water separate, into the Christian and the man. The grip whereby Hegel sought to unite him in himself turned out to be premature, too strong, or too weak, even, to prevent the centripetal forces of both sides from once again shattering the unity. That was probably the deepest, and perhaps the tragic meaning of the

[87] Barth, *PT*, 410.
[88] Ibid. 410-11.

catastrophe of Hegelianism.[89]

Why does Barth say that Hegel's grip was "too strong, *or* too weak"? Why the apparent uncertainty? What Barth actually seems to mean is that Hegel's grip was too strong to be acceptable to either theology or 'modern cultural awareness'. His synthesis was too theological. Yet at the same time his grip was, from the point of view of a theology like Barth's, still not strong enough; and Barth therefore ponders whether, if Hegel's grip had been stronger still, he might just have been believed.

There is an ambivalence in Barth's account here. He seems to hold out two possibilities regarding Hegel's rejection: *either* he was too theological *or* he was insufficiently theological. In fact, I am suggesting, the latter is not a plausible interpretation of the history in question. It is essentially a critique of the entire age's patterns of thought, conducted from Barth's theological point of view. There are points where Barth seems to admit that this is the case. He understands that the age sought a synthesis, a means of overcoming the alienation of object from subject, nature from spirit, inclination from reason; and he acknowledges that Hegel achieved such a synthesis, but also that it demanded too much of the age. Modern cultural awareness, Barth says,

> neither sought to understand itself in its own depth, nor did it want to be reconciled in this depth with Christian awareness in such a way as Hegel thought it should be. Why not? Because the demand was too great, its conditions too theological? That is in fact how it was felt and how it is usually represented.[90]

This seems to me to amount to an admission, albeit rather grudging, that

[89] Barth, *PT*, 411.

[90] Ibid. 414-5. A less idiosyncratic account of the demise of Hegel's thought after 1840 can be found in Taylor *Hegel*, 538-545. Taylor emphasizes the significance of the rise of technology and of industrial society in the mid-nineteenth century, with its instrumental modes of reason. Such developments sat relatively easily with Enlightenment thought, but less comfortably with the line of thought from Rousseau to Hegel, which Taylor calls expressivism. Hegel in particular "attempted to integrate the expressivist current in more than subordinate ways", something which proved to be out of step with the civilization of the second half of the nineteenth century, which "tended to entrench the Enlightenment conception of man, in its progressive transformation of nature, in its collective structures and in its most prestigious intellectual achievement, science." (p. 542.) Barth was perhaps disinclined to highlight this type of explanation because of his overriding concern to emphasize the continuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Hegel was not rejected in favour of a more orthodox theism.

At bottom, though, Barth's interest was not in giving an accurate and detailed account of the reasons for Hegel's rejection. His primary interest was in his critique of the entire period. He therefore concluded his discussion with a section which pondered further the possibility that Hegel's thought may have had "too little theology in it, for it to seem worthy of belief".[91] He attempted to justify this thought, and his earlier reflections on the rejection of Hegel, by identifying what he saw as Hegel's inadequacies. First, he questioned Hegel's view of truth at the centre of what it is to be human, asking: "Does not man always exist at the invisible intersection of his thinking and willing?" He suggests that Hegel's emphasis on truth was a valuable corrective against imbalance, but was itself insufficiently aware of the practical character of truth: the theory of truth, he says, can surely only be "the theory of human practice".[92] Because Hegel does not acknowledge this, he speaks of matters which a theory of human practice would remain silent on - he seeks to think and speak "beyond the mystery of evil and salvation".[93] This seems to be a plea for a recognition of the kind of limits which Barth had emphasized in his discussion of Kant.

Secondly, Barth comments on Hegel's view of the self-movement of truth, which "is identical with the self-movement of the thinking of the human subject".[94] Because of this, Barth suggests, there is no real basis in Hegel for a relationship between God and humanity; there can be no real confrontation between them, and no real revelation. Thirdly and most importantly, though, Barth suggests that Hegel's dialectical method, when identified with God, involves an abolition of divine sovereignty. God "is God only in so far as he is the mind of the Church". On such a basis there can be no knowledge of "the actual dialectic of grace".[95] All three of Barth's criticisms amount in fact to this: there can be no true revelation, for revelation cannot be a free act of God; within Hegel's thought, God's revelation *must* take place in the manner in which it does in fact take place. Hegel is insufficiently theological

[91] Barth, *PT*, 415.
[92] Ibid. 417-8.
[93] Ibid. 418.
[94] Ibid. 418.
[95] Ibid. 420.

precisely in his "failure to recognize that God is free—one might perhaps say in all succinctness: in the failure to recognize double predestination".[96]

There is a striking contrast here: at the end of this line of thought Barth detects the obliteration of divine freedom. By contrast, as noted earlier, this line had begun with the discovery of feeling, in which the capacity of human reason is expanded, and humanity acquires a "superior freedom" in which it is "*impassible comme Dieu même*".[97] Absolute humanity appropriates the superior freedom which had once been, and might still yet be, supposed to belong to God alone.

It would be remiss of me not to note that this exposition and critique of Hegel is highly contestable. One problem is a tendency to assimilate Hegel's notion of *Geist* to the human spirit, and therefore to see Hegel's talk of God collapsing into talk of humanity.[98] It would be more usual to see the danger in Hegel's system as lying in the opposite direction, the dissolution of the human into the divine. Barth's treatment on this point in fact reflects the tendency of certain of the Young Hegelians more than Hegel himself.[99] A related problem is the claim that Hegel obliterates divine freedom. Barth pays little attention to Hegel's insistence on the radical freedom of absolute *Geist* which, unlike the individual human spirit, does not come to self-expression and awareness in the acknowledgement of something which is given to it. Nothing is given for absolute *Geist*. As Charles Taylor puts it: "Freedom for man means the free realization of a vocation which is largely given. But *Geist* should be free in a radical sense. What it realizes and recognizes as having been realized is not given, but determined by itself."[100] Certainly, *Geist* is bound by rational necessity, but it is not necessarily fair to say that it is therefore not free. For Hegel the following of rational necessity is, similar to the case of the Kantian moral subject, the paradigm of

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96 Barth, *PT*, 420.

97 Ibid. 230.

98 See for example ibid. 419: "Hegel's living God—he saw God's aliveness well, and saw it better than many theologians—is actually the living man."

99 See Taylor *Hegel*, 71 f. and 546-7.

100 Ibid. 92. For a good discussion of Barth's criticism, and of Barth and Hegel on divine freedom, see Gary D. Badcock 'Divine Freedom in Hegel' in *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 61 (1995), 265-271.

freedom.[101] Admittedly, Hegel's view differs from the mainstream of traditional theism. Many would read Hegel as saying that *Geist* cannot exist without the world, and Barth therefore has some justification for saying that creation is necessary for Hegel's God.[102] But even then it is at very least a moot point whether Barth is entitled to say that revelation "can now no longer be a free act of God".[103] It can just as well be replied that rational necessity is the ground of freedom rather than a limit upon it.

These problems in Barth's treatment of Hegel are instructive, however. In his criticisms, as indeed in his exegesis of Hegel in terms of the self-confidence of the thinking human subject, Barth's over-riding aim was to present Hegel as the culmination of absolutism, understood as the grounding of culture in human decision and will. In doing so he undervalues the extent to which Hegel's *Geist* constitutes a dialectical supercession of such absolutism and of the oppositions which it implies. Barth's treatment of Hegel therefore distorts its subject; but it also disguises the substantial similarities between Hegel's thought and Barth's own dialectical inversion of absolutism.

vii. The failure and triumph of absolutism

What is not in dispute, though, is that in Barth's account of the entire line from Rousseau to Hegel, his aim has been to affirm and expand the claim that the fundamental principle of modern thought and culture is absolutism. He recognized no genuine opposition between those intellectual and cultural movements which understood themselves as a rejection of the Enlightenment and that which they sought to reject. The broadening of the concept of reason that took place in the idealist and romantic strands of nineteenth century thought constituted a fulfilment rather than a rejection of Enlightenment faith in human powers. Barth's aim was to reveal absolutism as the principle not only of eighteenth century thought and life, but of the whole of the Enlightenment project, a project which, on this account as on MacIntyre's, does not cease with the ending of the eighteenth century, nor

101 See Taylor, *Hegel*, 93-4 for a useful summary of Hegel's position on this.
102 See ibid. 100-102. For a slightly different view, though, see Badcock, op cit.
103 Barth, *PT*, 420.

even with the end of the nineteenth.

The demise of Hegel signalled, for Barth, the failure of the Enlightenment, understood as the attempt to ground culture on the basis of human will and decision. Like MacIntyre, then, Barth believed both that the intellectual project of Enlightenment had failed, and that it had been bound to fail. But this does not mean, in either Barth's view or MacIntyre's, that the principles and forces which the Enlightenment had sought to justify have ceased to be relevant. On the contrary, the modern world is a product of these very principles and forces. In MacIntyre's terms, we live in an emotivist culture. In Barth's terms, while the intellectual project of grounding absolutism may have failed, the modern world still knows of no other standard than human will and decision. The failure of the intellectual project of Enlightenment is accompanied by absolutism's *de facto* triumph.

But Barth's view of this absolutism is by no means neutral. His description of the path from the demise of the Holy Roman Empire to the rejection of the philosophy of Hegel is at the same time a sustained critique of absolutism. As the principle of a culture emancipated from the Church, absolutism can accommodate the Church only on terms which Barth clearly regards as unacceptable. On the whole he refrained, in these historical lectures, from prescribing any detailed theological response. It is nonetheless clear that Barth's point of view was the same whether he was writing history or theology. One could not act as if absolutism did not exist, as if the emancipation of culture from the Church had never happened. Nor, though, could one simply accept that human will and decision are the only standards available. Barth's lectures confirm that his theology can and ought to be understood as a response to the Enlightenment. It is a response which recognizes absolutism, the grounding of social, moral and cultural life in human decision and will, as the legacy of the Enlightenment. It neither accepts this absolutism nor imagines that it can simply oppose it. Instead, it seeks to overcome it by effecting its inversion, or rather by seeking to conform to the only decision which matters, the divine decision which has already overcome it.

There is one issue arising from the foregoing discussion which ought to be addressed before concluding. A principal aim of that discussion has been to highlight the similarities between Barth and Alasdair MacIntyre with regard to their attitudes to the Enlightenment. The question is whether it is credible to compare their narratives as I have done, given that they were written from very different points of view. This question is particularly pressing since a presupposition of MacIntyre's narrative in *After Virtue* is that any attempt to give a historical and sociological account of morals will presuppose a particular evaluative standpoint, and that standpoint will be in dialogue with the views one is seeking to give an account of. Similarly in the introductory section to his lectures on modern theology, Barth affirms that to write a history of theology requires a prior engagement with the subject matter. No neutral standpoint is available. And when we look at the standpoints from which Barth and MacIntyre have written, it is immediately clear that they are not the same. In *After Virtue* and the works which have followed and supplemented it, MacIntyre espouses the recovery of "a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition".[1] And while he seeks to describe this 'tradition-constituted-enquiry' in ways that are neutral between competing traditions, this does not detract from the fact that a good deal of the conceptual superstructure is provided by Aristotle. He seeks to revive 'the tradition of the virtues', and he takes Aristotle to be the most important guide to their nature. Barth's understanding of dogmatics, however, is not obviously Aristotelian, and there seems to be little to connect his theology, or theological ethics, to any Aristotelian view of the virtues.

What is necessary then is some comparison of these two viewpoints, one in the tradition of the virtues, one in dialectical dogmatics. To do this properly would require a detailed account of each, something which is beyond the scope of the present discussion. I want nonetheless to make a few points in defence of my prior argument, by highlighting what seem to me to be significant analogies between the two viewpoints. The first thing to be said

[1] *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 7.

is that the two are related in their perception that the basis for their discourse must be the revival, albeit in a criticized and amended form, of a discourse that had largely been swept away by the Enlightenment. They share, in other words, the sense that there is a break in history, "a before and an after" as MacIntyre puts it.[2] This divides them from those who see a unified history of enquiry, whether that unified history is of reason as "impersonal, universal and disinterested" or as "the unwitting representative of particular interests".[3] MacIntyre's description of the alternative to such a unified history applies to Barth's viewpoint as well as to his own: it is

> the possibility that reason can only move towards being genuinely universal and impersonal in so far as it is neither neutral nor disinterested, that membership in a particular type of moral community, one from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational enquiry and more especially for moral and theological enquiry.[4]

Involved in this also is the conviction that discourse has to be socially embodied. MacIntyre knows that what is needed is not just the construction of a new (or old) kind of moral theory. In a by now famous passage from the end of *After Virtue* he says: "What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us."[5] For Barth also it is not just a new (or old) kind of theology which is needed. Theology must be rooted in the Church, and be addressed to the Church. What is needed therefore is the recovery by the Church of its awareness of its true identity, founded in that judgement in which grace is also present. Barth's concept of ecclesiastical dogmatics corresponds remarkably well in these respects to the concept of socially embodied rational enquiry which MacIntyre elucidates.

Another similarity is in the type of realism which each seems to involve. MacIntyre describes tradition-constituted-enquiry by highlighting the difference between those forms of enquiry rooted in Plato and Aristotle and

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2 *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 58-9.
3 Ibid. 59.
4 Ibid. 59-60.
5 *AV*, 263.

the main stream of post-Enlightenment thought:

> It is a central feature of all crafts, of furniture making and fishing and farming, as much as of philosophy, that they require the minds of those who engage in the craft to come to terms with and make themselves adequate to the existence and proprieties of some set of objects conceived to exist independently of those minds. The embodied mind, in and through its activity, has to become receptive to forms (eide) of what is other than itself and in being constituted by those formal objects becomes, in the appropriate way, them.[6]

Such was the realism of Augustine and Aquinas, and of theologians who participated in the revival of Thomism. This type of realism, though, was at variance with Enlightenment thought. Moreover it conceived the relation of theology and philosophy very differently from the Enlightenment:

> For where that philosophy subjected theology to the same rational standards which it imposed elsewhere, rejecting, modifying, and truncating theism until it became a doctrine acceptable within the framework imposed by the encyclopaedist's unitary and ahistorical conception of rationality–'God' is ... the name of the ultimate object of rational enquiry–so making of the object only what the mind conceived in post-Kantian terms allowed it to be, the philosophy of craft-tradition presented the mind as inadequate until it has conformed itself to the object which theology presented for its attention.[7]

For Barth, something similar holds. The mind is inadequate, not fit for the object which theology presents for its attention; and that object is indeed genuinely other than the mind, and independent of it. However we cannot ourselves achieve a conformity of our minds to that object. This doesn't mean, though, that such conformity is an unattainable ideal; it is attainable only on the basis of the gracious decision of God. Our words may also be God's Word. Dogmatics can and ought be attempted, then, and may yet serve its object faithfully:

> Theological thought and speech must venture to let itself be led by its object and to live in the strength of the truth of its object. In this disclosed weakness our words must be witnesses. Thought and speech about God must be ventured. But the final outcome must be left to God's own Word. This must come to expression in the theses of dogmatics, too.[8]

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6 *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 68.

7 Ibid. 68-9.

8 Barth, *GD*, 372.

In conformity to God's Word, then, and in the service of it, rational enquiry, in the form of dogmatic theology, is possible and in fact necessary.[9]

Perhaps the most interesting point of comparison between the two viewpoints, though, is something which I referred to at the start of this postscript, but which has been illuminated by these points made since. It is essentially this: both Barth and MacIntyre reject the notion of a neutral standpoint, and of a neutral rationality which can assess any claim made from any standpoint. Their discourse presupposes the existence of a particular tradition of enquiry in which they participate, and of a particular community in which their discourse is embodied. And for both, significantly, achieving this understanding of their situation constituted the solution to a problem, a problem which has been called the paradox of point of view. MacIntyre gave some indication of this in the preface to *After Virtue*. He noted there that his earlier writing on moral philosophy, dating from the mid 1960s, had offered a critique of modern morality and moral theory which was in most respects the same as the critique contained in *After Virtue*.[10] What that earlier work lacked, though, was the ability to recognize the fact that its own judgements were "informed by a distinct evaluative standpoint".[11] In his own early writing, he notes, he

> seemed to be asserting that the nature of moral community and moral judgment in distinctively modern societies was such that it was no longer possible to appeal to moral criteria in a way that had been possible in other times and places — *and* that this was a moral calamity! But to *what* could I be appealing, if my own analysis was correct?[12]

On what grounds, after all, could MacIntyre possibly pass moral judgements about the fact that, as he presented it, morality in the modern world consists of the incoherent remnants of older schemes of thought and

[9] See Barth, *GD*, 12f. where Barth insists that dogmatics is concerned to discover something rather than to invent or establish something. Recall also Barth's comments in his 1913 lecture 'Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott', p. 23: "The scientific character of dogmatics cannot consist in the freedom from contradiction of the most harmonious system possible, but in the most exact interpretation possible of religious reality by its propositions, and in the greatest possible purity and completeness of thought. In this respect Calvin's *Institutio* is more scientific than most of what has been written in dogmatics since."

[10] See *AV* p. ix. The earlier works relevant include *A Short History of Ethics* (Macmillan, London, 1966).

[11] *AV*, ix.

[12] Ibid. ix.

judgement? His analysis, as he later came to realize, undermined itself. Jeffrey Stout has highlighted the paradox nicely:

> The narrative lacks a point of view from which the fragmentation might be judged and found wanting. Author and reader alike are left suspended in mid-air — disillusioned, perhaps, but unable to judge or to act. MacIntyre seems to have been looking down on his age from above, while also telling us that this cannot be done.[13]

As Stout points out MacIntyre's later work, beginning with *After Virtue*, is in fact an attempt to recast his earlier narrative so as to find a way round the paradox of point of view. What Stout also deserves credit for pointing out, though, is that the difficulty faced by MacIntyre was not unique to him, but simply one instance of a much wider problem. The paradox of point of view, he notes, has plagued many varieties of modern writing, to the extent that MacIntyre's earlier work can be seen as "a typically modernist authorship".[14] Stout explains this as follows:

> Literary critics since Henry James have spoken of the problem of point of view in fiction ... MacIntyre's difficulty shows that historical writing encounters its own versions of this problem, though without the full range of options writers of fiction have at their disposal for resolving it.[15]

MacIntyre's difficulty, then, amounted to a recurrence of a problem that has been widely reflected in modern art and literature, as for example in the developments in painting noted earlier, in which there is no longer a fixed stable point from which the subject can be viewed, but multiple and shifting perspectives.

More important in the present context is the fact that MacIntyre's difficulty is a recurrence of the problem which Barth had faced in his earlier work, the paradox implied in his attempt to speak of a universal *Krisis* of judgement. As I argued earlier, Barth's turn to dogmatic method in the early twenties constituted the adoption of a point of view, and therefore a way round the paradox of point of view embodied in the dialectical form of theological speech, which constantly undermines itself. Barth found himself

[13] Jeffrey Stout, 'Virtue among the Ruins', 262.
[14] Ibid. 261.
[15] Ibid. 261.

increasingly unwilling or unable to perform the "appalling performance" of balancing on a vanishing point. The solution came from the idea of God's gracious decision to allow our words to be the vehicle of his Word; on such a basis, on the Word of God so understood, dogmatic theology becomes possible and necessary, and one can reconnect oneself to the dogmatic theological tradition of one's community, at a point at which it still had something of that understanding of its own nature.

Both Barth and MacIntyre arrive at their mature positions by finding a way round the modern paradox of point of view, self-consciously connecting their discourse to a tradition of enquiry which predates Enlightenment presuppositions. MacIntyre, as Stout points out, offers us a renewal of the tradition of the virtues among the ruins of the Enlightenment project and the morality it sought to defend. By contrast, Barth offers not virtue but dogmatics among the ruins.

Appendix A

Kantian vs. neo-Kantian elements in Barth, with particular reference to the second *Römerbrief*.

In his substantial study, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, Bruce McCormack argues that Barth's theology acquired a new starting point around 1915, a starting point which can properly be described as "critically realistic". In McCormack's view it is this critical realism which distinguishes Barth's new theology from his previous views, which had depended on an idealistic grounding.[1] Inattention to this shift has sometimes been responsible, McCormack suggests, for the failure to appreciate the sharpness of Barth's break with Herrmannian theology.[2] What, though, does McCormack mean by the phrase 'critical realism'? It indicates, first of all, that Barth did not leave idealism behind altogether. He, "would continue to acknowledge the general validity of the idealistic point of view where knowledge of the 'given' was concerned. The 'given' ... is the product of the knowing activity of the human subject."[3] This is the significance of the term 'critical'. The term 'realism', though, is the more important one. It is intended by McCormack to signify that the reality of God is to be conceived in such a way that it is "real, whole, and complete in itself apart from the knowing activity of the human subject".[4] As McCormack presents it, there is a bifurcation here: idealism for the empirical realm, realism for God.

McCormack makes this analysis more specific by considering the philosophical influences relevant to Barth's critical realism. His fundamental claim is a slightly surprising one: Barth's position, he says, has less to do with neo-Kantianism than with Kant himself.[5] In McCormack's view Barth rejected the stronger idealism of Cohen, turning back to Kant because of the

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1 *CRDT*, 67.

2 He criticises Hans Frei in particular for this failure. See ibid. 67.

3 Ibid. 67.

4 Ibid. 67.

5 See for example ibid. 130, where he says that Barth: "everywhere presupposed ... the validity of Kant's epistemology (where it touched upon knowledge of empirical reality)". This, of course, heavily qualifies McCormack's earlier affirmation of Barth's idealism.

element of realism in the latter's philosophy. McCormack presumably regards this as true of Barth's thinking from 1915 onwards, but he suggests that it was around 1920 that this turn to Kant was strongest. At that time, he argues, Barth moved "away from the thoroughgoing constructivist epistemology of the neo-Kantians" towards a view in which "human beings have intuitions of objectively real empirical data".[6] McCormack has repeated this claim in a recent article, reviewing Graham Ward's book *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*.[7] He says there that Barth "had revised his philosophical commitments in the direction of a more classical form of Kantianism by 1920".[8] Reinforcing the point a page later, he says that Barth "abandoned Cohenian constructivism around 1920 in favour of a more traditional form of Kantianism which allowed greater room for realism".[9]

The real importance of all this for McCormack, of course, does not lie in its relevance to Barth's view of empirical realities; what matters is its relevance to his understanding of God. McCormack wants to establish that Barth's theology begins from the reality of God, a reality which "precedes all human knowing".[10] And in order to establish this, he regards it as vital to show that Barth turned from neo-Kantianism to Kant. Without Kant's notion of intuition, McCormack says, "a critically realistic theology in the form Barth was now developing would have been impossible."[11]

What evidence does McCormack produce for his claim that there is a significant relation between Barth's theological realism and Kant's notion of intuition? Surprisingly, there is only one piece, which is to be found in his consideration of Barth's second commentary on *Romans*. It comes in the course of a discussion of that volume's theology of revelation.[12] Barth, McCormack says, wanted to speak of revelation in such a way as to retain a distinction between revelation and its medium; his favourite way of doing

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6 *CRDT*, 226.

7 See 'Graham Ward's *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*' in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996), 97-109.

8 Ibid. 104.

9 Ibid. 105.

10 *CRDT*, 67.

11 Ibid. 226.

12 See ibid. 226, where McCormack says: "the theology of revelation set forth in *Romans II* was more Kantian than it was neo-Kantian".

this was to use the Kantian terminology of intuition. He quotes Barth as saying that revelation "does not become intuitable next to other intuitable objects; it becomes intuitable as the Unintuitable".[13]

The critical question here is how we are to interpret Barth's talk of the unintuitable, and its becoming intuitable. One possible reading would be to say that by the unintuitable, Barth means the object as it is in itself, rather than as it appears to us. This would seem to make reasonable sense. After all the union of intuition and concepts does not yield knowledge of things as they are in themselves. Kant says of the concept of a noumenon that we "do not possess an intuition, indeed, not even the concept of a possible intuition, by means of which objects beyond the region of sensibility could be given us".[14] There are, certainly, some reasons for reading Barth this way. For one thing there is, on the face of it, an analogy between the hidden, inaccessible thing-in-itself, and the God who remains hidden, indeed who veils himself, even in the event of revelation. The Kantian distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal appears to be a useful model for a doctrine of revelation which emphasises the distinction between revelation and its medium.

It is interesting to note, then, that this does appear to be McCormack's reading of Barth. This states this most clearly, once again, in his review of Ward. He says:

> The coherent integration of his [Barth's] theological epistemology with this Kantian epistemology is easily grasped where once it is realized that, for Barth, God is the one noumenal reality which — precisely because He is the omnipotent divine Subject who created all things and is therefore Lord even over the subject-object split — is capable of grasping us through the phenomena from the other side.[15]

It is hardly surprising that McCormack should read Barth this way, though. If he did not, he would have no basis for connecting Kant's notion of

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[13] Quoted by McCormack *CRDT*, 249, from Barth *Romans II*, 67. See also McCormack ibid. 225. McCormack has chosen to retain the capitalisation of the noun in translation. I have not followed this except in direct quotations.

[14] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn, revised and ed. V. Politis, (J.M. Dent, London, 1993), 213.

[15] 'Graham Ward's *Barth* ...' op. cit. 105-6.

intuition with Barth's theological realism. Kant's 'realism' lies, after all, in the fact that he distinguished sharply between intuition and concepts, regarding the former as the apprehension of some reality that exists independently of our perception of it, albeit that we have and can have no knowledge of it as it is in itself. McCormack's position therefore actually requires that Barth's talk of the "unintuitable" be correlated with the Kantian thing-in-itself.

If this reading is sustainable, then, McCormack seems to have a case. Unfortunately, for him, it is not. The apparent analogy between the hidden God and the inaccessible thing-in-itself is specious. To envisage God as a *Ding an sich* lying behind some particular phenomenon is to envisage God as an object among other objects, known in the manner in which other objects are known, and unknown in the manner in which other objects are unknown. It is important, if not entirely surprising, to note that Barth explicitly rejected the idea that God can be envisaged as some kind of thing-in-itself, and for precisely this reason. One statement of this is in his Tambach lecture of 1919. The relevant passage reads as follows:

> Dead are all things which claim to be more than material, which claim a kind of reality in themselves. ... Dead are all 'things in themselves' (Dinge an sich), all the heres and theres, all the onces and nows, all the thises and thats which are not united to each other. Dead are all mere facts. Dead is all metaphysics. Dead were God himself if he moved his world only from the outside, if he were a 'thing in himself' and not the One in all, the Creator of all things visible and invisible, the beginning and the ending.[16]

It is notable that in this passage Barth seems to be rejecting a Kantian view of empirical reality, as well as the view of God in question. With regard to the latter, it demonstrates clearly that it would be quite inadmissible at the time of this lecture to compare Barth's view of the reality of God with the realism inherent in the positing of *Dinge an sich.*

The only doubt which might remain would be whether he still took this view two years later, when he wrote the second *Romans*, and after the date which McCormack identifies as the time of a definite turn towards Kant. It is extremely significant, then, that in the second edition of *Romans*, the very

16 *WGWM*, 291.

work to which McCormack appeals to justify his claims, Barth repeated his denial of the propriety of this comparison between God and things-in-themselves. He says:

> The final subjection to the wrath of God is faith in His righteousness: and then God is known as the Unknown God. As such, He is precisely no 'thing-in-itself', no metaphysical substance in the midst of other substances, no second, other Stranger, side by side with those whose existence is independent of Him. On the contrary, He is the eternal, pure Origin of all things.[17]

Not only does Barth here reject the comparison between God's reality and things-in-themselves, he opposes it with the neo-Kantian term *Ursprung*. Again the reason is that to think of God by analogy with things-in-themselves is to place him in the world as an object among other objects. Barth's rejection of any such view is reaffirmed a few pages later, once again in terms which suggest a heavy dependence on neo-Kantianism:

> If God, as the final Cause, could ... be placed within the succession of other things in this world, and if conclusions could be drawn about Him from the other things of the world, what are we then to make of the fact that the whole concrete world is ambiguous and under *Krisis*? There is no object apart from our thinking of it; nor has an object any clear characteristics save when we are able to recognize them by some quick-moving previous knowledge. ... If, therefore, God were ... an object among other objects, if He were Himself subject to the *Krisis*, He would then obviously not be God, and the true God would have to be sought in the Origin of the *Krisis*.[18]

There is certainly no basis here for the conclusion that Barth turned away from neo-Kantian constructivism towards a Kantian notion of intuition.

McCormack's reading seems untenable, then. It does not even seem to be consistent with the one passage he quotes, the statement that revelation "does not become intuitable next to other intuitable objects; it becomes intuitable as the Unintuitable".[19] If God were a noumenon behind some phenomenon, why would our intuition in this case be any different than in the case of other intuitable objects? Barth's denial that this is so would leave us no wiser. What could that denial mean, after all? There would be a real

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[17] *Romans II*, 77-8.
[18] Ibid. 82:
[19] *CRDT*, 249.

problem with the phrase "it becomes intuitable as the Unintuitable". It is hard to see what it could mean other than that revelation should become intuitable *as it is in itself*.[20] But this would not only be a paradox, it would amount to the destruction of Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Revelation, in this case, would be given to us not merely in the manner of other phenomena: it would be given to us absolutely. Kant called the concept of the noumenon a limitative concept;[21] if the thing-in-itself becomes intuitable as such, all limitation on our knowledge of it is gone. This would hardly be a return towards a 'classical' Kantianism. The trouble with this possibility, though, is not just that it would do violence to Kant's conceptuality: the real difficulty is that it would destroy the metaphor which made this reading attractive in the first place. To say that the thing as it is in itself becomes intuitable is to say the opposite, surely, of what Barth wanted to say. It would destroy precisely what Barth wanted to preserve, the hiddenness of God in revelation.

If McCormack's reading of Barth is untenable, though, what other way is there of interpreting the idea that the unintuitable must become intuitable? Assuming that Kant's philosophy is the proper context for reading such remarks (and this *is* an assumption) I would suggest the following: that by the unintuitable Barth had in mind those concepts which Kant believed transcend all actual and possible experience, in particular the concepts of God, freedom, and immortality. This reading does not, it should be noted, remove the paradoxical aspect of Barth's statements. Barth's views are not 'classical' Kantianism on this reading either. For it was quite inconceivable to Kant that such concepts (or 'transcendental ideas') should become objects of experience; but this is because of the nature of these particular concepts.[22] This reading is still, though, much less problematic than the alternative, for it avoids the position which Barth explicitly rejected in the two passages

[20] The only alternative interpretation I can imagine would be to say that Barth simply means that the unintuitable, i.e. the noumenon, is what is intuited; though it is not thereby known as it is in itself, only as it appears to us. However the second half of the sentence would then conflict with the first, for this is just what happens in the case of other intuitable objects.

[21] Kant op. cit. 213-4.

[22] See Kant ibid. 252. Such ideas, he says "are transcendent, and overstep the limits of all experience, in which, consequently, no object can ever be presented that would be perfectly adequate to a transcendental idea."

quoted above. It may not be consistent with Kant; but it does at least appear to be consistent with Barth.

The problem for McCormack, though, is that this reading does not support the conclusions he seeks to draw. Specifically, it does nothing to connect Barth's theological realism to Kant's notion of intuition. McCormack's desire to relate Barth to Kant seems to be motivated by a conviction that theological realism does not combine easily with neo-Kantian concepts. This may be so. McCormack is surely mistaken, though, to think that Kantian intuition is of any assistance here; the combination he offers is if anything even more problematic. Moreover the relevant texts simply do not support his interpretation. Neo-Kantian concepts are deeply embedded in the theology and conceptuality of the second *Romans*; the talk of the 'unintuitable' occurs much less frequently, and, despite McCormack's claims to the contrary, is of rather less significance.

To argue this is not, though, necessarily to present Barth as an orthodox neo-Kantian. It must be allowed that Barth made his own use of neo-Kantian concepts. This is something McCormack is well aware of, as the following passage testifies:

> Werner Ruschke has rightly observed that those critics who have complained about Barth's failure to use 'clean' (i.e. consistently defined) philosophical categories have themselves failed to realize that his use of them was governed by a theological subject-matter which required constant adaptation and alteration of their original meaning. This in itself is forceful testimony to the fact that *Romans II* was meant to be theology, not philosophy disguising itself as theology.[23]

It is, however, not only to neo-Kantianism that such comments apply. There is no reason to suppose that things were different when Barth used Kantian concepts and terminology. On no reading does Barth's talk of the unintuitable becoming intuitable sound like orthodox Kantianism, as already noted. It is not clear that he did accept a Kantian notion of intuition, let alone that he used it to explicate or defend his theological realism.

I would conclude that Barth's talk of the unintuitable becoming intuitable

[23] *CRDT*, 225, n. 57.

does not in any way establish that in the second *Romans* he accepted the validity of Kant's epistemology in general;[24] or that he turned away from neo-Kantianism; or that there was a "most crucial difference" here between Karl and his brother Heinrich;[25] or that his theological realism is grounded in Kant; and certainly not that Barth was moving towards a 'classical' or 'traditional' Kantianism. McCormack's attempt to establish Barth's Kantianism, and thereby to distance him from neo-Kantianism, is misconceived.

[24] See *CRDT*, 245, where McCormack claims that in the second *Romans* Barth "took for granted the validity of Kant's epistemology as set forth in the First Critique".
[25] Ibid. 225.

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